

Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY-JUNE 1991



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THIS MONTH'S COVER

Gordon W. Lillie's name is second only to William F. Cody's in wild west show history. In 1888, the twenty-eight year old Lillie formed a partnership with Charles M. Sothern, a Philadelphia theater manager, to take out Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West. After opening in Philadelphia, the show headed west, going as far as Kansas. Starting in July, it had a long run at Gloucester Beach in New Jersey where Annie Oakley, who had recently left the Buffalo Bill show after a beef with Cody, joined. Bad weather, poor management, and opposition from Cody conspired to kill the show at Easton, Maryland in late October.

After taking a year off to assist in the settlement of the Oklahoma Territory, Lillie re-entered the field show business in 1890, winning great fame and fortune which eventually led to a partnership with his old nemesis Cody.

The one sheet lithograph on this month's cover dates from the aborted 1888 tour. Co-owner Sothern's billing at the top left was mis-spelled, an oversight which was presumably never corrected as his involvement with Lillie ended that fall. This exceptional poster was printed by Avil Lithograph of Philadelphia which later did other work for Pawnee Bill including his 1890 program in which many of the scenes on this litho were recycled (see cover of

Bandwagon, May-June 1986). Poster is from the Ken Harck collection, originally from Dunwoody collection.

DAHLINGER NEW ARCHIVIST AT CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM

Fred Dahlinger, 39, has been appointed archivist and historian at the Circus World Museum. He will be responsible for all aspects of the Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center, the finest repository of materials relating to the circus in the world. Greg Parkinson, the museum's executive director, offered the position to Dahlinger after an intensive search in which over 150 applications were screened.

Dahlinger, who began studying the circus as a teenager, is one of the country's leading authorities on the subject, publishing over twenty articles on various aspects of show history. An expert on mechanical musical instruments, he has written extensively on calliopes. He is thoroughly familiar with the available primary and secondary source material on field shows, the result of innumerable hours spent researching various topics in libraries, historical societies and archives. He worked the summer of 1970 in the museum's library under the tutelage of the late Bob Parkinson.

A 1973 graduate of Carnegie-Mellon University, Dahlinger has spent the last

eighteen years as an engineer and engineering manager in the steel industry, most recently with Inland Steel. He will assume his new position in late June. He is the current vice-president of the CHS, and his wife Johann is the immediate past secretary-treasurer of the organization.

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If your payment is not received by July 10, 1991 the July-August *Bandwagon* will not be mailed.

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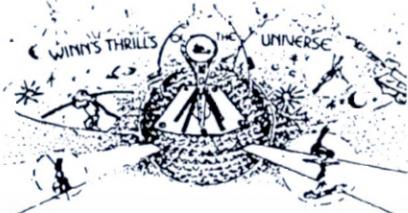
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Part One
Season of 1931

I stated in my article titled "Famous Robbins Circus, Season of 1936 and other James Heron shows of the 1930s" in the March-April 1989 *Bandwagon* that separate articles covering Heron's Walter L. Main circus of 1931 and 1932 were planned. The reason was the availability of so much data it would have been too much to include in the original story. A review of the previously published article is suggested as many details will not be repeated. An additional interview with Roger Boyd who was with the Main show in 1931 and 1932 was conducted which was most helpful in preparing this article.

James Heron, a native of Worcester, Massachusetts, owned the Downie Bros. Circus, one of the largest of the motorized shows, in 1930 from April 1 to September 12. He purchased the show from Charles Sparks and later sold it back to him. The reasons for the rather quick sell back to Sparks are not known, but it is believed Sparks returned to Heron his down payment of \$25,000. The balance of \$25,000 was not due until January 1, 1931 so it was not repossessed. In all probability Sparks was unhappy being out of circus business and pressured Heron into letting him have the show back. Heron, likewise, must have been bored after selling the show, and he too lost no time in returning to the business.

The February 21, 1931 *Billboard* carried an advertisement over Heron's name. It read: "Will buy truck circus. Entire outfit or any part of motorized circus. Must be priced in keeping with the times and will pay cash for same. Will buy elephants separate, or will consider partner in truck show. Replies confidential. Mail full particulars and lowest price to James Heron, Box 94, Harve de Grace, Maryland."

Heron wasn't long in getting the motorized show he wanted. The April 4 *Billboard* reported that Heron and William (Honest Bill) Newton, had organized the Motor Circus Corporation of America to operate the Walter L. Main Circus in

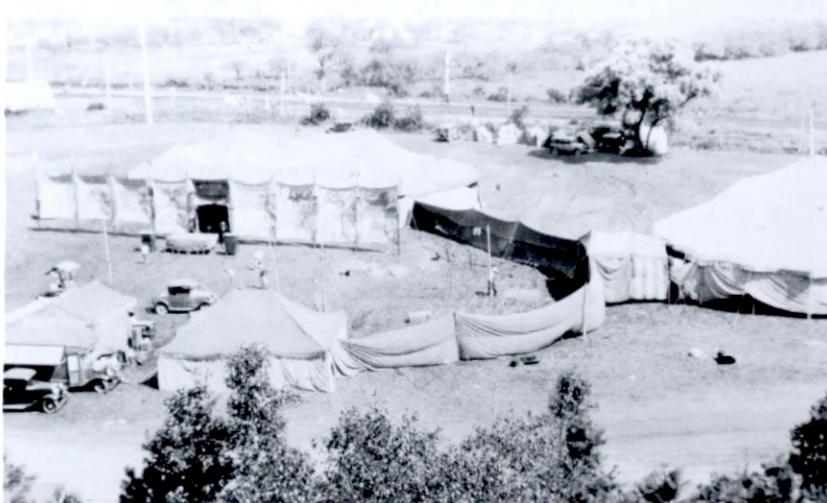
THE WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS

SEASONS OF 1931 AND 1932

BY JOSEPH T. BRADBURY

1931. The deal had been closed March 20 at Ashtabula, Ohio. The title was leased from Walter L. Main of Geneva, Ohio. The article also said that Jerome T. Harriman, who had piloted the Downie show the four prior seasons, was to be general agent. Heron and Harriman had worked together on the Andrew Downie's Walter L. Main railroad show. The circus was to be enlarged by fifteen trucks and would have four elephants. The new Main circus was quartered at the Jefferson, Ohio fairgrounds where work was in progress. New cages and additional semi-trailers were under construction. A street parade was to be featured. Eight 16 foot cages

Midway layout of the Walter L. Main Circus in 1931. At top foreground is the main side show and bannerline. At bottom the ticket truck, concession tent and pit show. At right is the marquee and a portion of the menagerie tent. Billy Dick photo in Bradbury collection.



were to be used. The show claimed it would have eighteen lions, five leopards, several bears, five elephants, five camels as well as other animals in the menagerie. The article concluded by stating an order had been placed with the Erie Lithograph Company for a line of special paper as well as beautiful cloth banners. Four trucks, two autos and a crew of sixteen would comprise the advance department. A large bill car was being built.

Some of the numbers claimed were exaggerated as was often the case in the enthusiasm to boost a new show. The show had only two elephants in 1931, Honest Bill Newton's large Jap, which he had owned for several years and the young male elephant, Nemo, which Heron purchased a few weeks later from George P. Dorsey, operator of Dorsey Bros. Circus in Chicago. Other *Billboard* accounts said the show had four new semi-trailer cages, each containing three dens of wild animals. This was probably the correct number although photos taken in 1932 picture only three.

In April the show ran this *Billboard* advertisement, "Walter L. Main Circus wants first class feature act for big show, novelty acts for side show, wrestler for concert. Working men who can drive trucks. Lions for sale, specimens, cheap to quick buyers. Address Walter L. Main Circus, Jefferson, Ohio." A second ad wanted a circus decorator and painter quick. Applicants were urged to wire the show at quarters.

The April 25 *Billboard* reported the show would open the season in Ashtabula, Ohio on April 25. Other nearby Ohio spots were said to be on the route for late April and early May. Another report said the show would face early opposition at Greensburg, Pennsylvania on May 7 where Barnett Bros. was scheduled for April 27. However, it had been friendly opposition with each show refraining from covering the other's billing paper.

Competition was a fact of life for the show in 1931 and even before opening day the *Billboard* reported that truck

shows were all set to invade New England. Headed that way were Downie Bros., Wheeler & Sautelle, Barnett Bros. and Walter L. Main. It was also reported the Ringling organization would be sending the fifteen car Sparks Circus into the area as opposition to the motorized outfits.

Although the previous season, the first full year of the great depression, saw a number of shows killed off including several railroad circuses, John Robinson, Christy Bros., and Cole Bros., still enough survived to make a formidable group to try it again in 1931. Railers hitting the road included Ringling-Barnum on 90 cars; Sells-Floto on 35; Hagenbeck-Wallace on 30; A. G. Barnes on 30; Sparks on 15; Robbins Bros. on 15; and the 101 Ranch Wild West on 20. Motorized shows were Downie Bros., Mighty Haag, St.



The Main parade lining up during the 1931 season. Billy Dick photo in Bradbury collection.

Leon Bros., Seils-Sterling, Hunt's, Wheeler & Sautelle, Schell Bros., Lewis Bros. Barnett Bros., Robbins (Sam B. Dill), Russell Bros., Knight Bros., Sam Dock, Todd Bros., Fisher Bros., Snyder Bros., Original Gentry Bros.; Conley Bros., Olinger Bros., Orton Bros., Henry Bros., Mack Hale Bros., Barlow, Escalante, Ferris, and Walter L. Main.

Only two rail shows paraded, Robbins Bros. and 101 Ranch Wild West, but many of the larger motorized circuses made the daily march, including Downie Bros., Wheeler & Sautelle, Schell Bros., Barnett Bros., Sam B. Dill's Robbins and Walter L. Main.

Several articles were published in the *Billboard* concerning activities at the Jefferson, Ohio quarters just prior to start of the season. One said that Walter L. Main visited almost daily and was highly pleased with the efforts of the new manager, James Heron. Main himself had been a partner with William Newton in the National Show Company which operated a Walter L. Main titled circus in 1930, but he personally no longer shared in the



ownership having only leased his name for use by the Heron-Newton combine. It was also mentioned that Main had recently returned to his Geneva, Ohio home from a trip to Philadelphia and Washington and a visit to the Hunt Circus quarters in Pikesville, Maryland.

Another report said the show had added a new big top middle piece and two new trucks had been purchased to handle the canvas of the enlarged circus. A new candy truck and tableau parade truck were acquired to augment the motorized equipment

and four head of menage horses had been bought. Ayesba, a big dromedary recently bought from Robinson Brothers in San Francisco, had arrived.

The advance department was now set with the following staff, Jerome Harriman general agent; Cly Newton, manager of advertising cars; Lou Ritt, special agent; J. Eddie Sheets and J. D. McNeely, opposition agents; and Robert Thatcher, boss billposter with eleven billers. The advance had four trucks and two autos. Mrs. Harriman was contracting press agent, and Mrs. Cly Newton called on

The Walter L. Main Circus on the Attleboro, Massachusetts lot on May 27, 1931. Left to right are the side show, menagerie and big top, all having three center poles and two middle pieces. John Cutler photo in Bradbury collection.

The 1931 Main side show banner line. The Peggy From Paris banners flank the entrance banner. Billy Dick photo in Bradbury collection.

school superintendents to arrange for closing of schools on circus day. It was noted the advance got off to a flying start at Ashtabula, Ohio, the initial stand, April 11, by posting 3,000 sheets of paper and tacking 400 sheets of cloth banners. The date would indicate the bill crew was working the standard 14 days ahead of the scheduled circus opening on April 25.

A final report before start of the season said that Peggy Waddell and Billy Dick, female impersonators, would be on the show marking their fifth season under Jimmy Heron's management. They were to operate the Peggy From Paris exotic dancing pit show on the midway.

Although it was earlier stated the show planned several stands in Ohio, the opening in Ashtabula would be the only stand in that state during the entire season. Main moved immediately into West Virginia then made a run through southern Pennsylvania to New Jersey, then into New York and on to New England.

The show opened as scheduled in Ashtabula on April 25 and the May 2 *Billboard* covered the event in an extensive review. So detailed and complete was it that it is printed here in its entirety.

"Capacity crowd sees Main circus open, despite rain. Initial performance at Ashtabula, Ohio, runs long, but will be trimmed, little evidence of last season's show in 1931 edition, 45 trucks are used for transportation.

"In an all-day downpour, the re-





The animal and working crews posed with Nemo for Edward J. Kelty in Red Bank, New Jersey on August 10, 1931. Dunn-Tibbals collection.



Bennie Flower and the big show band ready for a 1931 Main parade. Pfening Archives.

juvenated Walter L. Main Circus, with James Heron at the helm, made its debut here this afternoon with a matinee performance to a house that taxed the new big top to capacity. The rain failed to dampen the ardor of the enterprising young showman, and the premiere went

A three den cage in the 1931 Attleboro Main parade. All photos of the parade are by John Cutler unless otherwise credited.



off without the slightest deviation from the original program. Promptly at 2:15, equestrian director Bert Wallace blew his whistle, signaling the start of the grand entry, headed by Joe Clark on his frisky mount carrying a large American flag. While the initial performance ran overly long, it will be gradually trimmed down to the regulation hour and a half. The show has a world of splendid talent, but Manager Heron is still not satisfied with the program, and within a few days will further augment the already large array of acts.

"There is little evidence of last season's Main circus in this year's edition. It is true that some of the costuming is a bit frayed, but the management has in mind some revelations in wardrobe to be added before the show is many days on tour. Today's premiere was given after one dress rehearsal on Friday night, the show moving on to the lot here from winter quarters at Jefferson, Ohio. Performance is presented in a new 100 foot round top, with three 40s. There are two rings and later a stage may be added.

"Show's equipment is the real surprise, there being hardly a resemblance of the former season's accessories on hand. Every unit of rolling stock has been rebuilt, and an entire fleet of new trucks of the semi-trailer type has been purchased. Practically everything is moved on semi-trailers this season, all newly painted red with flashy yellow title lettering. A new ticket-office truck has been added, also a complete three-unit lighting plant, which supplies current for the entire show. Cookhouse top is new and there is an enlarged menagerie top. Not a piece of equipment was overlooked by the painters.

"It is evident that Heron has expended a small fortune for equipment for his new venture. There are 45 motor trucks in the cavalcade, and these augmented by performers' private cars bring the total to near 80. Admission prices are 50 and 25 cents, with 25 cents for reserves. Concert tickets are 15 cents.

"One of the outstanding improvements is the street parade, in which 21 tableau and cage trucks are used. Four bands are interspersed throughout the route. There are 12 mounts, 16 ponies, 2 elephants, 5 camels, and the traditional calliope. Pageant is a real flash and the management plans to make it one of the season's exploitation campaigns.

"Menagerie is twice its former size, 20 cages of wild animals being presented. There are four six-wheel trailer trucks, each having three cross cages. These were built in Ashtabula to the specifications of Manager Heron and have been the source of much comment among showfolk. In the menagerie are two elephants, a new baby bull having been purchased recently from the Dorsey show. Five camels are also featured in the menagerie in addition to ponies and other small stock.

"Side show attractions include Jean McLeod, Scotch bagpiper; Frances Stillman, snakes; Ramer, accordionist; Del Reno, fire eater; Harris Lynn and his black minstrels, eight people, including two girl entertainers, and Clara Sampson. Top is a 60 with two 30s, and there are 10 platforms. Doc Leon makes openings and is on tickets, assisted by S. Slitz. Peggy From Paris is the pit show attraction.

"Bennie Fowler has an excellent band, including J. Arbuckle and Emil Swatosh, solo cornets; John Haines, first cornet; Gordon Newham and Thomas Dean, clarinets; Seldon Graves, Lew Murphy and Ed Menke, trombones; Fred Hanson, baritone; Ted Brown, sousaphone; John Mueller, snare drum; Albert Yoder, bass drum.

"Fowler will be the mailman again this season and will handle the *Billboard* on the show.

"Swede Johnson is producing clown and in clown alley are Charlie Robinson, Happy Marquet, Mac Duncan and Pearl Harris, the last named doing the come-in again. Bobby White offers a high trapeze free act.

"In Swede Johnson's wild west are J. W. Jackson, Tex Joe Clark and wife, and Bobby White, trick roping. There are four head of stock. Concert is given over to the wild west and a featured wrestling bout. Jimmy Ray is the show's wrestler.

"There were many visitors during the day, including the city officials of Ashtabula, Jefferson and Geneva, as well as county executives. Walter L. Main was much in evidence and was given an honored place in the parade. John Creamer who gave the

show much assistance here, was a guest of manager Heron. He and Walter McKay are Ashtabula circus fans. Chester H. Taylor, Columbus insurance man, was here on business in connection with the show. James Shiff, formerly a rider with 101 Ranch, was a visitor.

"The Program

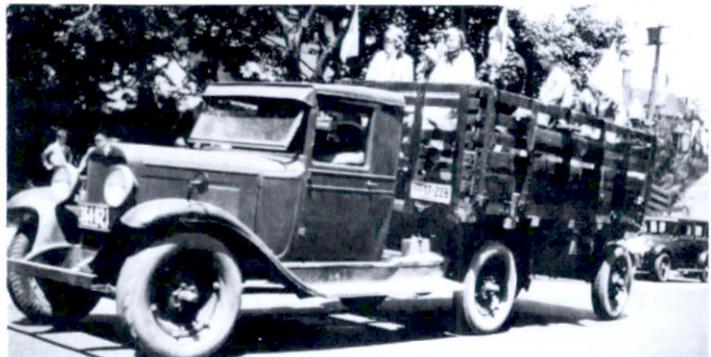
"Leading the tournament was Joe Clark on a prancing steed holding a large American flag, and followed by all performers of the big show, much new wardrobe being in evidence. Pageant was augmented by those from the side show, and the elephants, wild west and camels brought up the rear.

"No sooner had the pageant passed in review than attention was diverted to the two rings. In one Wallace put trained ponies with riding dogs through their paces, while Doc Young presented a similar number in the other ring. Following the opening number, double and single traps were offered, being one of the most effective in the program. The Whitlers, Aerial Shelleys and Bobby White performed. The double trapeze number closes strong with a sensational whirl by the feminine members of the troupe. Four ponies are presented by Wallace in an entertaining drill, and as this turn climaxes the clowns make their initial appearance. Some of the numbers are new and amusing, while in most part old tricks are resorted to by the joey. They appear at six intervals during the program, the most amusing number being the clown band stunt, which still gets a big laugh. Mary Whitler and Emily Shelley offer next their swinging perch novelty, which clicked well. Echo, drawing a special announcement by Doc Young, makes his initial bow at this time, offering his head balancing, while Mary Whitler performs on the Roman rings. The next spot is given over to the Great Del Beanie, who holds attention with his contortion turn, while Arthur Whitler offers a similar novelty in ring number 2. On the swinging ladders Pearl Harris and Jeanette Wallace do the usual standard turn. Next is the iron jaw number done by Mary Whitler and Mme Perez, which act is somewhat different from the usual routine. For fully 15 minutes 'Cupid,' for many seasons the Main show's outstanding trained pony entertains with much the same routine as in past seasons. Doc Young replaced William Newton in handling the pony this season. 'Nemo' the small elephant follows doing a pleasing routine of tricks and worked by Jeanette Wallace. Second special announcement concerns Arthur Whitler, who does daring wire walking, holding the spot himself for fully ten minutes. His act is easily one of the outstanding features. Few on the bill are more versatile than Whitler, who appears five times in the program, each time in a different turn. A short frolic by the trained dogs follows, in two rings presented by Jeanette and Bert Wallace. First concert announcement with Doc Young doing the talking and introducing Swede Johnson and his congress of riders. An old time circus turn is revived in the next number by the Great Del Beanie, who brings back to the big top his staircase and wagon wheel novelty, which for many years he has offered in vaude and in South American and Australian circuses. It goes over big. In the opposite ring Echo demonstrates his ability at tub juggling with his feet, also an entertaining novelty. Jeanette and Bert Wallace present a short menage act, which could stand strengthening, for the way the number stands it is only a fair effort. The Echo Troupe, two people, make their farewell appearance in their carrying perch number, the woman doing the heavy ground work, while in the other ring the Great Del Beanie brings back another old time circus novelty, the unsupported ladder, working atop a table. The next to closing number also is also outstanding, the Perez Trio, three people in some excellent gymnastic and tumbling feats. Best is a back flip to the ground, which brought heavy applause. Jeanette Wallace presents the elephants and for the finale Doc Young invited the audience to ride the big bull around the arena, the show closing when he dumps the adults into a heap, much to the merriment of the crowd."

Later a roster of staff and department heads was published. It listed James Heron, manager; William (Honest Bill) Newton, assistant manager; Jerome Harriman, general agent; Cly Newton,



The 1931 Main parade had at least three cage semis, possibly more.

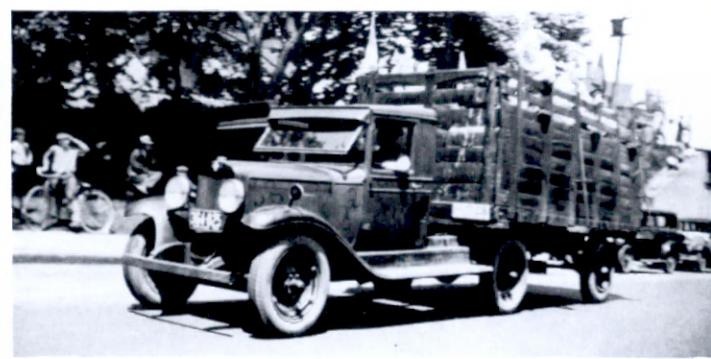


A group of costumed performers in the 1931 Attleboro parade.



Walter L. Main semi No. 30 carried two lady performers in the parade.

This single tired semi carried the clown band in the 1931 parade.



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After the George Hanneford family joined Main on May 26 they were featured in the show's newspaper ads. Pfening Archives.

manager advertising cars; H. Frederick, side show manager; J. Parsons, legal adjuster; Mrs. Marie Heron, superintendent of privileges; Bennie Fowler, bandmaster; F. J. Mitchell, treasurer; J. LeClair, big top boss canvasman; Jimmy Dugan, 24 man; Henry Strouse, special agent; Allen Baker, press agent; and Bert Wallace, equestrian director.

Despite the bad weather the Walter L. Main show encountered on opening day the good take was a real boost to the morale of Heron who had put up considerable funds to launch the show and of course to Honest Bill Newton who had a sizeable investment in it. Actually, it seems the show did fairly well during the early part of 1931. Despite the heavy opposition at times from other shows the take was okay, especially in New England. Things didn't sour until sometime in August. Afterwards it was down hill fast when the show moved into regions hit very hard by the depression. Although the Main circus never got into the deep south during the season it was in that region that the worst of the depression hit in the early fall of 1931 when cotton and

other commodity prices sank to their lowest level of the era.

Following the opening the show made a Sunday run into West Virginia to play Weirton and Moundsville, then moved into Pennsylvania to play Washington and Waynesburg. It returned for one more West Virginia stand at Morgantown after which came nine dates which took the show across the Keystone state, interrupted by a May 6 stand in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Photos, especially the set taken by John Cutler at Attleboro, Massachusetts May 27, give us a good look at the physical set-up of the show as well as the street parade. The three major tents, big top, menagerie, and side show, all had three center poles, the big, top being a 100 ft. in the round with two 40s, side show a 60 with two 30s, and menagerie somewhat larger. Although the *Billboard* review claimed three middles in the big top, only two are pictured here. In all probability the planned addition of the center ring stage never materialized and the show continued with a two ring format as used at the opening. Photos show the side show to have had eight large banners, four on either side of entrance. One of the main side show banners advertised "Peggy From Paris." Earlier reports stated that Peggy would be operated separately as a pit show on the midway. A pit show does appear in photos, one of the female impersonators mentioned earlier may have appeared in the pit show while the other did the traditional "cooch" blowoff in the side show.

As the *Billboard* reviewer observed, photos indeed show most of the vehicles to be of the tractor and semi-trailer variety but most were lightweight and many had only single wheels. They were open topped, with the exception of the cage semis. Many of the sides were fully slatted and some had a couple of slatted boards at the top. On these seat boards were inserted for the bands and other participants to sit on during the parade. The elephants, camels, horses and other lead stock were transported in open top semis with their heads sticking up higher than the vehicle's sides. They made an unusual sight compared to present standards.

Photos of the parade show a group of rather plainly painted vehicles with no elaborately decorated special tableau trucks like the Downie and Barnett shows had. The group of five camels was one of the more spectacular sights in the parade and the elephant herd of big Jap followed by little Nemo must have been pleasing to the curb side spectators. The air calliope which brought up the rear was mounted on a small straight bed truck with opened side and rear panels. It was titled and decorated and equipped with small parade

flags as were the other vehicles in the march.

Pottstown on May 13 was the final Pennsylvania stand before the show went into New Jersey at Washington. Additional dates were at Somerville and New Brunswick, then it was into New York and Long Island. Tom Gorman, head of the Variety Manager's Association, and Pat Casey, well known vaudeville and motion picture operator, visited at Port Washington, New York on May 18. Gorman became an important figure with the Walter L. Main circus in 1932.

Not too much information appeared in the *Billboard* concerning the show during the early weeks of the season. The show advertised in a May issue wanting a first class novelty act to feature, a first assistant on the big top, seat men, riggers and a cornet player for the side show band.

One short note in the May 23 issue said the show had been issued a license to play Attleboro, Massachusetts on May 27 following a squabble over the matter when the petition was first presented to the city council. The license fee was \$15, water charge \$12, and \$50 for police protection. Another item said that both Walter L. Main and the Wheeler & Sautelle circuses would play Sanford, Maine, with Wheeler coming in May 22, followed by Main on May 30. Both shows were also booked for Dover, New Hampshire.

Glen Cove on May 23 was the last New

The Walter L. Main show issued this wait handbill ahead of the Downie Bros. Wareham stand on July 8. Pfening Archives.

COMING SOON! WAIT!

**DON'T BE MISLED BY
UNFAIR COMPETITORS**

THE ORIGINAL

**WALTER L. MAIN
CIRCUS**

WITH

The Hanneford Family

World's Greatest Bareback Riders

**Will Positively Appear At
WAREHAM**

Saturday, Aug. 1st

COMING SOON! WAIT!

York date, then the circus went into Connecticut at Middleton and at Willimantic the next day.

Willimantic was a significant stand as the performance was given a big boost with the addition of two outstanding acts. First was the George Hanneford Family of bareback riders featuring George, the "riding fool." The Hanneford act consisted of seven people and five head of stock. Special paper was used for the riding act. The act was featured in the show's newspaper ads.

Also joining the program were the Maxillians, a group of Mexican acrobats and tumblers. This was their first appearance in the United States. Observers termed it a sensational tumbling act. Heron, who told the *Billboard* reviewer he still wasn't satisfied with the performance on opening day, surely must have been pleased with the addition of these strong acts. The performance was as strong as any of the competing motorized shows in the area.

The June 13 *Billboard* said that John Yost saw the show in Willimantic and reported the seats were filled at the matinee and the tent was packed at night. Side show and concert business was also good. He noted there were 16 lions, 5 camels, 2 elephants, and other animals. He said that Walter L. Main himself was traveling with the show, something which had not been previously reported, and was entertaining guests almost daily. Main, who had been familiar with New England territory for forty years, had many important contacts there and was touring with the show as a sort of goodwill ambassador and helped advertise and promote the circus bearing his name. But Main wasn't the only circus man at home in New England. So was Al F. Wheeler of the Wheeler & Sautelle Circus. Old Sig Sautelle had been dead a few years but Wheeler knew the area well as his shows had played it many times in the past. The same could be said for Charles Sparks owner of Downie Bros. which was touring the same territory as Wheeler and Main. Sparks' former railroad circus, now a 15 car show owned by Ringling, was fighting the truckers for a share of the business, an unusual situation. Charlie Sparks' Downie Bros. was in competition with the circus bearing his name during the 1931 season.

After Willimantic the show invaded Massachusetts at Attleboro where the *Billboard* quot-



This photo of James Heron, on left, and Charles Sparks appeared in the January 10, 1931 *Billboard*. Pfening Archives.

ed visitors saying that the performance was very good. The stand was followed by Norwood and Newburyport on May 29 where Arthur Whitler and his wife were injured when they fell twenty feet to the ground during their aerial number. There were two front page stories in the Newburyport *Daily News* which told the story of the mayor's fight with the school superintendent about closing the schools so kids could visit the show at the matinee. The mayor wanted a school holiday on circus day but lost out. There was plenty of fireworks over the matter.

Nearly every week the *Billboard* contained some little tidbit about the show even if no major news was presented. One such item said that Ben R. Jones, the

The cookhouse crew posed for this Kelty photo in 1931. Dunn-Tibbals collection.



show's treasurer, reported he was enjoying the daily drives from town to town, and there will be no more railroad shows for him. Another note said that two new horses were being broken by Bert Wallace for menage, giving the show a total of seven high school horses.

The route next took the show into Sanford, Maine on May 30, which was followed by Dover, New Hampshire, then a return to Maine for an extensive tour of thirty-five consecutive stands ending at Norway. The show then moved into New Hampshire at North Conway for six stands. It then went back into Massachusetts where eleven dates were booked.

The July 4 *Billboard* said that Harry Strouse, the Walter L. Main advertising banner man, had been getting his share of business. Other notes reported that general agent Jerome Harriman had been back on the show at Fort Kent, Maine on June 22 for a conference with manager Heron. It was mentioned that Mrs. Marie Heron was then in charge of the candy stands; J. E. (Judge) Parsons was legal adjuster; Jack Sampson was pit show manager; Cly Newton was in charge of the advance cars. A final note reported that L. M. Shaver, reserve seat ticket boss, had become thoroughly acclimatized to the motor circus business after being with Christy Bros. rail show in 1930.

The show advertised in the July 11 *Billboard* wanting a Scotch band, or any feature novelty act for the side show. The show listed an African lion for sale.

The August 1 *Billboard* reported the Walter L. Main show had played to some fine houses in New England. Walter L. Main remarked that when the show played Calais, Maine on June 26 he remembered playing the same stand forty-two years before, but not on the same lot as used in 1889. Most of the attendance in Calais was from the Canadian side of the river.

Later trade publication accounts advised the show's overall business business in New England had been good. The take was heavy at Winchendon, Massachusetts on July 21 and Leominster the next day also produced two good houses. At Ayer on July 23, the Main show was said to be the first circus there since Lincoln Bros. in 1921. A confusing report said the show played Fitchburg on a lot owned by R. L. Sanderson, a calliope player, and at the request of show officials

he got out his music book and made the parade. Fitchburg doesn't appear on the show's official route. The date may have been one very close to Fitchburg and the writer could have been confused as to the actual billed stand. A final report noted that the show might remain in New England longer than originally planned as several additional towns wanted the Walter L. Main show.

The show played on a new lot at Framingham, Massachusetts on July 24 where it had two packed houses. On the night of July 28 during the move from Hyannis to Provincetown the cookhouse truck skidded and crashed into a telephone pole injuring six cooks and shaking up others. The truck driven by William Adams and the scene of the accident was at Brewster about halfway between Hyannis and Provincetown. The injured were taken to Cape Cod Hospital in Provincetown. When manager Heron and Walter L.

The executives and performing personnel of the Main show posed for Edward J. Kelty in Port Jefferson, New York on May 22. William Newton and James



Small type at the top of James Heron's 1931 Main letterhead read "Motor Circus Corp. operating." Pfening Archives.

Main were informed of the accident they ordered everything possible done for the victims and made arrangements to repair the damage done to the truck.

Wareham on August 1 was the final date in Massachusetts and the New England tour came to an end. The show then returned to New York and the Long Island area. A week of stands was played at Hempstead, Huntington, Riverhead, Greenport, Sag Harbor and Southampton. Then it was back into New Jersey on August 10 at Red Bank where Edward J. Kel-

Heron are in the second row under the clown with a big hat. Mrs. Heron is at the right of her husband and Walter L. Main is at her right. Dunn-Tibbals collection.

ty, noted circus photographer, took additional group pictures of the show's personnel. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sparks attended the night performance in Red Bank, where the tent was about half filled although rain came down in torrents. The reserves were packed

for the concert. Downie Bros. was playing near by at Toms River. Many of the Main show's people exchanged visits with Downie Bros.

The show stayed a week in New Jersey. The August 15 *Billboard* said the Main outfit billed heavy for its stands in Egg Harbor City and Wildwood. It was felt there would be good business due to the absence of circuses in this territory since cuses within three days. Downie Bros. was there August 8 and Walter L. Main the 11th. Neither however appeared in the city proper. Downie was at Bradley Beach, a shore town, two miles away while Main had a lot in Neptune City. A short notice advised that the Walter L. Main Circus may again winter in Jefferson, Ohio as negotiations were underway.

A week later the *Billboard* said that Besie Costello, an equestrienne with the George Hanneford Family, was doing



daily interviews with feature story writers. A story about Miss Co-stello written by Dixie Wilson had appeared in *Good Housekeeping* which was picked up by newspapers on the Main route. Another note said that Mr. and Mrs. William Newton, Jr. and family had spent a recent Sunday visiting Snyder Bros. Circus at Millbrook, New Jersey. Their daughter and son-in-law were on the Snyder show. A final note said the Flying Azores, a flying return act, were making their initial appearance in the United States and never failed to stop the show with their act. This was the first mention of this act being in the Main performance.

The same *Billboard* also carried two Main show advertisements. One wanted a boss canvasman, a first assistant on the big top, riggers, seatmen, a sailmaker, black clarinet and saxophone players for side show, a Hawaiian dancer for side show and experienced man to sell frozen sweets. In the other ad the show wanted billposters, bannermen, lithographers and all around billers who could drive a truck.

When the New Jersey route was completed the circus went into Pennsylvania for a single date at Norristown. The show went into Maryland at Elkton and played Annapolis, Leonardtown and La Plata. A stand was played in Virginia at Leesburg on August 22.

The August 29 *Billboard* carried an interesting story which said the recent opposition battle between the Main and Downie shows had been a clean fight when they were in close proximity in eastern territory. Downie general agent T. W. Ballenger found his route playing four days behind Walter L. Main, so he pulled four days out of his original route to play Asbury Park and Red Bank, New Jersey, two days ahead of Main. To even the score Main took three towns, Norristown, Pennsylvania on August 17, Annapolis, Maryland on August 19 and Elkins, West Virginia on August 26, all one day ahead of Downie. Despite the matching of wits between Jerome T. Harriman of Main and T. W. Ballenger of Downie not one sheet of paper had been violated by either show. At Norristown both shows billed the town the same day and it was just a question of getting the billing first, because once obtained it was assured by the other it would stay.

At Norristown Main laid out space for the Downie cookhouse on the lot so that they would not be delayed in serving breakfast. However manager Sparks kept the cookhouse in Camden until morning so as not to conflict with the Main show. The writer concluded the conditions proved the success of the motor circus



Main pick-up truck No. 58 carrying the air calliope brought up the rear of the 1931 street parade.

meeting that had been held in May in Washington, D. C.

A final report said three circuses were in the Philadelphia area, Downie Bros., Barnett Bros. and Walter L. Main. The shows had been in New Jersey during the last two weeks and were following each other within a day in several places. Business in some was bad and in others fair. Walter L. Main was said to have had good attendance in Norristown.

A tour of West Virginia began after one more Virginia date, Front Royal on August 24. The first of fourteen stands started at Romney. Very little news concerning the show's activities came in the trade publication but as subsequent events turned out it was evident that the good take of earlier weeks had now dropped off considerably. The *Billboard* did report that at Bluefield, West Virginia on September 7 a notice was posted that there would be a five percent cut in pay for performers and other personnel to take place September 13. The show continued its route after Bluefield playing Vivian and Bramwell in West Virginia and Virginia stands at Richlands and Abingdon. The pay cut went in effect on Sunday at Kingsport, Tennessee, where performances were scheduled for September 14th. Al (Plato) LaRue, producing clown wrote the *Billboard* that he, along with the George Hanneford family, decided not to take the cut and left the show. In all probability others took the same action because as it turned out the Kingsport stand was the final one of the season. Just a couple days before the September 12 *Billboard* contained an advertisement stating that the Walter L. Main show wanted for a long season, musicians on all instruments. Salary offered was \$15 a week. Also needed were novelty and comedy acts.

The same *Billboard* carried a current roster the advance. There had been many changes since the start of the season. Jerome Harriman was still general agent

and J. Eddie Sheets was local contractor. Robert L. Morgan was car manager and Leonard Loenwald, boss billposter. There were then six billers, two lithographers, two bannermen. The September 26 *Billboard* published official notice that the show had closed after the night performance in Kingsport Tennessee on September 14. It had been booked to play Staunton, Virginia on September 22 as well as other dates which were cancelled.

A week later the *Billboard* reported that the Walter L. Main Circus, now known only by its corporate name Motor Show Corporation, was wintering in Winchester, Virginia. The article said the show had accepted an invitation by the Winchester fair officials to winter in the city. The circus trucks were received at the entrance to the city by representatives of the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. City officials and show personnel had already assured local leaders that they would play an important role in community activities. It had been arranged to have the menagerie open to the public as a zoo, with a small admission charge.

The article reported that before coming to Winchester the Main title had been removed from all equipment and it was not known what title would be used the following season. Circus fans in the Washington, D.C. area had been helpful in securing the Winchester quarters.

Several weeks later the *Billboard* reported the zoo operated by the Motor Circus Corporation at the Winchester fair grounds had been drawing good crowds when weather permitted. The zoo had not been open on Sundays because of local blue laws.

And thus the first year of Jimmy Heron's circus came to a close. After a good start it had barely survived at the end. During the season the show began using merchants tickets. Roger Boyd says this plan was the salvation of the motorized circus that year. It was a promotional tie-in with local stores and newspapers. Tickets were distributed by the various merchants, usually only one per town, which would permit the holder to attend the circus at a discount price. General admission with a merchant ticket was often as low as ten or fifteen cents. Various methods were used to distribute the tickets. Grocery stores usually would give one to a customer with the purchase of a certain dollar amount. Sometimes they were printed as coupons in newspaper ads to be redeemed at the ticket wagon. In any event virtually all motorized shows, large and small, used the plan at some time during the depression.

PART TWO

Vaudeville Days

During those years that Con spent travelling the backblocks with the family circus, he repeatedly turned down offers from the theatre circuits of the big cities until he could offer something that would surpass anything that could be imported from overseas. Only in 1922, did Con accept an invitation from Jack Musgrave of the Tivoli theatre circuit to come down to Sydney for an audition. Long accustomed to the casual life of the Australia bush circus artist, Con arrived at the stag door of the Tivoli in Sydney with his apparatus--his rigging, wires, props and so on--stuffed into several sugar bags. If the Tivoli management had concerns about Con's outward lack of glamour, these were soon put to one side after they saw the bill of fare that Con offered at that momentous audition. As well as his forward somersault on the wire, Con showed them a number of other acts on the wire including one that featured him removing an outer layer of costume as he turned a crutch-to-crutch somersault. The Tivoli immediately engaged Con at a salary of 60 pounds a week. The public went mad about his act. When he finished his contract with the Tivoli circuit he was snapped up by the rival Fuller circuit.⁴⁶

Mervyn King was a young member of the St. Leon acrobatic troupe, a first class troupe, that was playing the Australian vaudeville circuits--at 35 pounds a week!--at the time that Con was beginning to make a name for himself. He remembered: "[Connie] was working both the Tivoli and Fuller circuits before he left Australia. I was at the Tivoli at that time. I was talking to him backstage as a kid at the Bijou. That's the first place I seen him in vaudeville there. I know I was in the dressing room. He looked in the [mirror] on the wall and he said, 'You're some good looking fellow.' For those times he had the best [wire act]. I don't know if any of them have gone any further. He had so much control on the wire. He could do anything. He was likeable and well-liked but, still in all, he used to get very bad tempered at times."⁴⁷

And you were talking to him backstage? What were you talking to him about?

"Well, I think, [if] I remember rightly, he said he was trying to talk his family into giving the circus away and coming

The Great CON COLLEANO

1899 - 1973

BY MARK ST. LEON

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into the vaudeville because he liked it. It was good for him. He was a good act. He had a very good act but he wasn't getting enough money for his act then."

What was he getting?

"I don't know what his wage was but he would get twice as much when he went on the Tivoli. You know, the old booking agents [for] Fullers and that, were the smart ones."

The magazine *The Theatre* recorded the following observation of Con's act at Fuller's Sydney theatre in May 1923: "Colleano's dancing on the slackwire at Fuller's Theatre is the prettiest thing to watch.

Con Colleano in the early 1920s. Circus World Museum collection.



His small feet twinkle gracefully in pirouette and entrechot alighting always on the wire with an effortless sureness that disguises the difficulty of the act. . . . Colleano's dressing is admirable. His slim figure and almost Italian darkness of face and hair are fittingly set off by the white satin suit. . . . His forward somersault is his star act. He explains that the danger lies in the fact that his feet coming over his head usually obscure his view of the wire and he has to land in mid-air without seeing his objective."⁴⁸

Con's act in those days was to the accompaniment

of tangos.

It was about this time that the newsreel filmmakers, *Australasian Gazette*, shot film of Con in action as well as the St. Leon acrobatic troupe. The film was shot out-of-doors in Sydney's Centennial Park. Mervyn King well remembered the occasion when I interviewed him 65 years later.⁴⁹

Did you ever see Con Colleano do the forward [somersault] then on the wire at any stage?

"Yes."

When was that? On the Tivoli?

"Yes, and he done it out at the park out here too."

When you did that film?

"Yes. A fellow named Sully took [film] of Connie. It was a windy day. Connie did the back and forward somersaults. Maurice [did] the round-off flip flap double. It was a windy day out there, too windy for doing tricks. Connie had trouble with his forward too. It was a bad day. They had three cameras. One was big and heavy. They used to get up speed on it and [then they] used to [signal] 'right' and away you'd go."

Unfortunately, efforts to locate this footage have so far proved unsuccessful.

The Akabah Arabs

Eventually Con made arrangements with the Tivoli management to engage the rest of the Colleano family for the circuit. They closed up the circus and came into vaudeville with their acrobatic act.

Eric Trevail recalled: "They got blown down and I think, if I remember rightly, they'd all had it. It had been a hard life. I'd reckon they were all wanting to get out. This was an opportunity. Something comes along that makes [you] decide to do something. Maurice was [doing] a ground-to-ground double somersault. In those days, I think he was supposed to

be the only one in the world doing it."⁵⁰

In those days, vaudeville acrobats were often presented in Arab costume and the Colleano family, to its displeasure, was to be no exception. The Tivoli management presented the eight Colleano children as the Akabah Arabs. Travail continued: "In those days it was 'in' to have Arab acrobats. Well Valentine [was] the thing at the time [as] Arab . . . Skeik of Araby."⁵¹

Everyone's of 14 March 1923 reported: "The Colleano family gave a special turn at the Tivoli, Sydney, last Friday week, when they were wonderfully successful; so much so, that manager Jack Musgrove made them what was a very fine offer, albeit Con Colleano [Snr] did not consider it sufficient . . . Colleano's Circus is working Sydney's outskirts . . . The Colleano family have had a fine offer to go to America and, providing they dispose of their own show at a satisfactory figure, it is very probable that they will leave within the next two months."

A week later, *Everyone's* reported: "Colleano's Circus having been on the road for several years, is now non-existent, the animals being sold last week. The Colleano family will play overseas time this year, and Con Colleano is now with Fuller's. It is the intention of the Colleanos to leave for England shortly. Some of the members of the team are amongst the finest acrobats in show business."

The Akabah Arabs were a hit everywhere they appeared on the Tivoli circuit throughout Australia. Understandably, their Arab disguise, which they had to strictly observe for the Tivoli management, gave rise to the occasional hilarious situation. In Adelaide, South Australia, the 'Arabs' were being driven through the main street to their theatre. At an intersection, in front of a throng of admiring but unsuspecting onlookers, a prankster broke their confidence.

The Akabah Arabs [were] supposed not to be able to speak English and [except] for Paddy [nobody would have recognised them as the Colleano family]. This mad Paddy used to belong to the circus. [He did] work, pulling up the tents and everything. Mad Paddy said, 'G'day Maurice. How're you going?' And Maurice [tried to ignore him]. He said, 'What goes with all this [outfit]?'"⁵²

Everyone's of 25 April 1923 reported: "Every now and again the cry is raised that Australia offers no scope to the local vaudeville artist and that there is no inducement to acts to reform, refurbish or attempt anything original or ambitious in wardrobe or effects because there is no



Con Colleano and sister Winnie. Pfenning Archives.

management able or willing to offer a long enough contract at a price sufficient to cover cost of production and preparation. There is further a feeling that Australian managements have an antipathy towards local acts. Analysis of the situation proves the utter fallacy of this contention. The high cost of steamer fares and the additional salary that must be paid to oversea artists to compensate for loss of travelling time would in themselves secure preference for locally-made acts provided the local acts could offer the goods in Sydney. . . . The Akabah Arabs [are a case in point]. The Akabah Arabs are none other than the Colleano family, who for some years have toured the Australian country districts with their own circus. The Arabs were brought into Sydney by the Musgrove management, which was quick to recognise the ability of the eight performers, equally able to see the raw spots, and broad enough in its policy to doctor them up at its own expense with a view to bringing the act up to Tivoli standard. Musgrove spent several hundred pounds in preparing the act, and when complete, topped the bill with it. It is extremely doubtful whether the Colleanos would have gone to the expense of scenery, wardrobe and effects to make their act the first-class offering it became with these adjuncts. And yet, in all probability, without the frills, the Colleanos, however clever, would not have won the success that is now theirs, for they are very much on the map in vaudeville. Last

week Musgrove signed them up for an African contract, which calls for fares from Africa to London or America, as desired, and the best offices of the Tivoli organisation are being employed to secure them bookings in both countries. Thus we see that . . . Harry Musgrove has brought from obscurity a troupe that on present indications is likely to be a world beater in vaudeville. It may be claimed that such tactics result in the building up of stars for other organisations which have taken no part in the initial expense or risk, but it is only by the employment of a policy of unselfishness on the part of Australian managements that local talent is to get a fair opportunity. [This example] of managerial encouragement given to local artists should raise the hopes of other gifted artists and prove to them that all is not lost simply because they happen to be Australians."

In spite of the Colleano family's disenchantment with its Arab garb its act was well received and the troupe subsequently accepted bookings for South Africa, England and America after the Tivoli engagement. At the time, old Con Colleano explained that the family expected to be away only three years. In fact, once the family settled in the United States it remained there, never to return to Australia.

Winnie

Con met Winnie Trevail, a vaudeville soubrette, in Melbourne in 1922 while he was still working in the family circus. Winnie's memories were tinged with romance and nostalgia when she recalled the meeting for me during a 1984 interview: "About 1922 I used to work with Lettie Creydon who was a star here in later years. She and I did a vaudeville act together and we also worked in revues and all that together. . . . This particular time we were in Melbourne in a revue. We were closing with the revue and coming to Sydney and she said to me: 'There's a circus just outside of Melbourne and I know a boy in there.' It was Ollie Jack and he did a balancing act of some kind. 'Would you like to go out there?' We were leaving for Sydney the following morning. So I said yes. It was pouring, pouring with rain this particular day. So we went out and when we got there—Con's brother Bonar used to do a slack wire—Con and Bonar were both on the wire at that time. I was introduced to Con. . . . We went back to the hotel where we stayed, Lettie and myself, and next morning we were leaving for Sydney. . . . Who should be standing on the platform but Con. . . . We said goodbye to him and that was the finish of that. Anyhow, I was working in

Sydney at the National Theatre and the curtain went up one day and Con was sitting in the front row. He was waiting when I came out of the stage door. . . . We talked and that's how it started. He was still with his father's circus at that time. . . . The Tivoli engaged him and he got 60 pounds a week which was a lot of money in those days. . . . I had to smile because he always aimed high all the time. From the very first time he went on the Tivoli he got himself a young fellow who would take care of his costumes and business things that he wanted done. He started to get bigger as things went along. I was with the National with Sir Benjamin Fuller. Con had finished with the Tivoli so Fuller's engaged him and we went on the same bill together which was good in those days because we were going together. When that contract finished we went through New Zealand. He used to come and put his rigging up at my parent's place in Sydney and practice when he was laying off.⁵³

Eventually Winnie took her place in Con's act, billed as "Zeneto," and Con taught her to go through a brief routine on the wire.

George Perry remembered: "They used to [do] a dance before they got on the wire. She'd be doing the dancing, the Spanish dancing and so forth while Connie was working on the wire. I reckon she made Connie. She learned him to dance and he used to dance lovely on the wire. Well, I seen Connie get up and do a Charleston on the wire. A Charleston on the wire, yeah."⁵⁴

The couple presented a rich contrast on stage, Con with his handsome, dark features, and Winnie with her blonde hair, the proverbial English rose. Winnie left handwritten notes of her family history. Suitably edited, they read as follows:

"I am Winifred Constance Stanley Trevail Colleano and I am telling this regarding my family as to the best of my knowledge. Our parents were Herbert Fleming Trevail and Alice Maude Stanley Trevail. They had four children, myself, W. C. S., Eric Herbert Stanley, Lancelot Edwin Stanley, and Carmen Joyce Stanley. Our grandparents were Charles Trevail, born in Cornwall, and Mary Fleming Trevail, born in England. They had three sons, Freddy Herbert, our father, and Ted, and two daughters, Lily and Daisy. Our father was born 15 February 1877 in London England, our mother was born 21 December 1878 in Dinapaw or some such name [in] India. Lady Louise Stanley, our grandmother, was in boarding school in India [when] she met and married our grandfather, [a Mr.] Blazey [sic], an engineer. Our mother was born in India, the

only child to [be] and direct descen[dant] to the Earl of Derby and [the] Stanley family of England. She and her parents left India when she was about 6 or 7, I [believe], for England and sadly enough her mother passed away on the ship and was buried at sea, a sight I do not think our mother ever forgot. Her given name [was]



May Wirth, Con Colleano and Lillian Lietzel, three center ring performers on Ringling-Barnum in 1925. Circus World Museum collection.

Alice Maude Stanley, Blazey [her married] surname, and she was brought up in India by [ayahs] whilst there and, when she left India, spoke [only] Hindustani, having been taken care of by the [ayahs]. Our parents lived in Brighton, England, and were married there in the[ir] early 20's. I was born in the same street as my father, 25 Wivil [sic] Road, Kensington, Surry, England [on the] 16 September 1900. . . . From England our parents decided to go to New Zealand [in 1906]. I had my birthday on the ship. I was then 7, Eric 4. . . . I was in show business from when I was fifteen. When a child, I was in Panto [mimes] and Revues here. I worked with all the leading comedians from here and overseas. I was [a] soubrette with Jim Gerald for four years, playing all kinds of parts. Also, as a child in New Zealand, the Sydney [shows] like . . . [Lizzette] Parkes and Nelly Stewart used to come to New Zealand and should they have to use a child actress, I was always sent for as the child actress. I also won an education competition there. All the children

were taught by elocution teachers, but mother and dad were my teachers. . . . I also played principal girl and second boy in 'panto' here in Sydney. Mother and Dad used to put on charity 'pantos' which were terrific, so much so [that] the daily papers [used to] come out with big write-ups saying what terrific shows they were, not a bit amateurish. I, of course, always played the lead. . . . I always [had] a flare for S. B."

As products of different social environments the two could not have been more mismatched. It wasn't long before the couple were engaged, however. Within the Colleano family, Con's fiancee became known as "Big Winnie" to avoid confusion with Con's trapeze artist sister, who became known as "Little Winnie."

South Africa

Con's early costume was merely top hat and tails but he came to adopt a Spanish style of dress, evidently with the encouragement of his fiancee. There is some suggestion, although not fully substantiated, that Con adopted the Spanish style to deflect any questioning of his black identity, questioning that could prove problematic if he was to tour overseas. The rest of the family, as the Akabah Arabs, had already left Australia for South Africa as the first leg of a world tour and Con was fully intending to follow them. George Perry commented: "I think before Connie went over to Africa and them places I think his family might have been over first. It would only be luck that they'd let them land there. The Colleanos passed [like] a foreign name. They didn't want coloured people [over there]. [The South Africans] hate [the] colored people. They are low-class Dutch. They're really cruel. I suppose for two years I was there. The colored people [were] alright, but the Dutch people hated them."⁵⁵

According to Mervyn King, Con even started to take rudimentary lessons in Spanish before leaving for South Africa.

"He didn't look Aboriginal at all as the average person would say. He didn't look like the [Aboriginal] people here at all but he could pass for a Spaniard very easily because he was a good looking fellow and his features were rather sharpish. He got the Spanish idea from an act out here on the Tivoli called the Three Knetos. They were Spaniards and they done a knock-about acrobatic act. They taught him lessons in Spanish because he didn't want to go at the Aboriginal thing at that time because he was going over as a Spaniard. He wanted to speak Spanish there I think."⁵⁶

A few months after the Akabah Arabs

left Australia, Con and his fiancee followed. *Everyone's* of 30 April 1924 mentioned that Con had appeared at the Tivoli Theatre in Cape Town during the week commencing 10 March 1924. It has been recorded in some international histories of the circus that Con first performed his famous forward somersault on the wire before a public audience in Johannesburg. It is clearly recorded that he had given performances in vaudeville of the trick in Australia before leaving. What seems more certain is that, while he performed in Johannesburg, Con adopted the Spanish costume-toreador style—which was to be the trademark of his wirewalking act for the remainder of his career. The incorporation of his famous cape dance was still to come however. An old Australian vaudeville lady, Iris Shand, remembered seeing Con in South Africa with her parents, also visiting circus artists, back in 1924: "At the time that my mother and father were working with the African Trust, we happened to hit Cape Town when Con [Colleano] was on his way to England I should think. The African Trust was like Fuller's Circuit or [the] Tivoli Circuit. They used to have these big theatres in each city [in South Africa] in Johannesburg, Durban. They had about six theatres that you play in. At this time we played Cape Town, we were all staying at the same hotel. Con Colleano was a friend of my father and my mother. [He was] with Winnie but at that time we never knew that he would be marrying Winnie. I thought she was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen, this pretty blonde lady, [in a] lovely black chiffon sequin sort of gown. I think she walked across the wire with an umbrella. That's all she did [in the act] and then just handled his props or his cape or his breakaway trousers that he used to do [to reveal] those lovely matador trousers [he had] on [underneath]."⁵⁷

Was he wearing Spanish costume at that stage?

"Yes, yes, but I don't think he was doing the cape. I can't remember that. I think he added that when he went away and polished his act more. When he was doing his last trip, I didn't see it of course, he used to grab the wire in between his feet and spin around and sort of do a 'layout.' The wire broke and he went out over the pit into the stalls but fortunately [he] didn't hurt anyone and didn't hurt himself badly [although he] strained his back. He couldn't work and my father used to massage his back for him. . . . His wife went on and did her act to fill in for him. I

saw him work again later on after he was world-renowned."

He was the first to do [a] forward, wasn't he, feet-to-feet?

"It had [only] been done into the 'fork' and then back onto the feet. So he passed himself off as a Spaniard, more or less, because he had fine features. He had sharp features."

Spanish features?

"Yes, I mean nothing [Aboriginal]. . . . He was fine, his body and his face and everything, you know. . . . No-one ever, ever spoke about them having coloured blood in them at all. I mean, even in America at the time he was there, they wouldn't have liked that very much. He was so beautiful . . . to look at. You would have thought he had been a trained ballet dancer. The way he used his hands, they

This three sheet lithograph was used by Ringling-Barnum in 1926. Note that Colleano was advertised as the "wizard of the high wire." Pfening Archives.



were so soft and beautiful. I noticed that when I saw him later on when I was grown up. His deportment was something I suppose that was just there. I never saw any of the other Colleanos work. I don't know whether they had it too. It was all Spanish music that he had [for his act]."

New York

In New York in September 1924, Con Colleano made his American debut with a week's engagement at the giant theatre, the Hippodrome, which was then under the management of the entrepreneurial firm, Keith-Albee.⁵⁸ Anxious to succeed in the show business capital of the world, Con had become impatient in the three days that he spent practising outside New York after arriving from Europe. So extraordinary and dramatic was the nearly tragic end to that first week's engagement that it has been retold many times—and greatly embellished—in American circus annals. In an interview given in 1940 Con

remembered the worst accident of his career: "Bad lighting was responsible for the worst fall I ever had. The thing happened when I first came to America, when I was most anxious to hold in this new setting the record I had made in other countries. I was fulfilling a week's engagement at the Hippodrome. The stage lighting was wrong for my kind of work. The footlights caused upward glare that struck me full in the face. Had I realised the source of the trouble, I would've insisted on the footlights being turned off; but I just knew that my eyes were paining me more and more as the week progressed and that the wire was becoming a blur to me. However, it was not until my last performance that my uneasiness actually caught up with me. I somehow managed to get through my dances and other stunts that night; but when it came to the forward somersault, it was a different story and a sad one. In that crucial split second before I threw I could not see the wire, my sixth sense and my sense of balance were void of support and both failed me. All I knew was that I was too far forward and that I was bound to hit the wire head-on. I jerked my head to one side, just in time for my chest to receive the cut that would've slashed my face. But I wasn't through with that fall yet; there still remained the nine feet from the wire to the floor, and this got all my attention. I hit the floor rolling and jumped to my feet. I glanced at my chest. It was cut wide open and blood was soaking my costume. As I staggered to the ascent of the wire, people were shouting, 'Don't do it, you're hurt!'

the wire, people were shouting, 'Don't do it, you're hurt!'

"But I could not give up. . . . I got my balance as best I could, then shot into the forward somersault. But, still off key, I didn't go far enough. This time I hit the wire with my heels and it threw me half across the stage on my head. The blow dazed me but I hadn't lost my objective to do the forward somersault before this audience. . . . There was great excitement now, both off and on the stage. People were crowding the aisles, calling out suggestions, calling for a doctor. Two attendants rushed up and stood me on my feet."⁵⁹

The account appears to be accurate enough to that point but, as Con went on to say, he [or his publicity agent] would have us believe that he finally turned the forward somersault that night on his fourth attempt, receiving ten minutes of tremendous applause from his stunned audience. *Variety* of 8 October 1924 told it a different way: "The stage crew, seeing the performer fall the second time, knew it was not stage business and rang down the curtain. Colleano was carried to his dressing room and treated for several abrasions and contusions of the head. Monday he was unable to move his right arm and it is now feared that several tendons have been sprained. . . . Despite the seriousness of the accident, few of the spectators were ruffled, most preferring to believe the falls were a part of the act."

Con spent the next ten days in the hospital, but at the end of that time he went back to the Hippodrome for an additional five weeks booking. He had, as the saying goes, "made good" in America. During those weeks, Mr. John Ringling's agent, Carl Hathaway, saw the act and engaged Con for the circus the following season.⁶⁰ Thus Con began a long association with the great Ringling circus as its centre-ring attraction, an association that was only interrupted each winter when, because the show would be laid up, Con played the theatres of America or toured the theatres and indoor circuses of Europe.

Ringling-Barnum

His salary with Ringling went up each season so that by the late 1930's he was earning \$1,000 per week with all expenses paid and the exceptional privilege of a private apartment on the circus train.⁶¹ The Ringling management allowed this privilege only to its most outstanding artists as space to convey the great circus was at a premium on the giant train.

According to the certificate of

marriage, Cornelius Sullivan [that is, Con] and Winifred C. Trevail were married in Detroit, Michigan on 10 July 1926 in the presence of Cath Pallenberg and Philip St. Leon, both performers on Ringling.⁶² A report of the wedding and a photograph appeared that day in the *Detroit Free Press*.⁶³

Con befriended young Mickey McGeehan in New York at Madison Square Garden in March of 1929. McGeehan became Con's right-hand man, chauffeur, prop man, bodyguard—and a lifelong friend.⁶⁴

McGeehan recalled: "[Con and Winnie had the best state room on the show train. It was done by a fellow from Philadelphia, I think. . . . They had what looked like a piano. The piano was the bed. Now the front part of the piano was a keyboard. It wasn't a stretch-out because, where the stretch-out was, [that] was the mattress. So they would pull this thing apart at night, and they had plenty of room. I imagine it was a good eighteen to twenty feet state room. It was the width of the car.]

I believe Con won the [boxing] title on the Ringling show several years in succession?

"Well, we had boxing matches between shows, naturally, and a couple of times I think, like in Washington, we had [them] in the morning too. But you don't usually go out and box real heavily in the morning when you've got two shows to do. . . . We boxed and I was Con's second. We used sixteen ounce gloves and when you get hit with a sixteen ounce glove you get hurt. You get knocked around but you don't get that physically knocked out."

Although mild-mannered, Con apparently could let his prowess as a boxer get

Colleano, clown Johnny Grady, Mrs. Colleano and sister Winnie playing cards in his dressing tent in the late 1920s. Pfening Archives.



the better of him, as his brother-in-law, Eric recalled: "When they were in New Orleans, Con was driving and this tram driver came over and went [too] close and abused Con. Con flattened him and broke his jaw. They arrested Con [and] put him in jail in New Orleans. They had him for assault. Then they got one of the big 'noises.' Winnie knew the names. He said, 'I'll get you out.' Anyhow, it cost Con quite a bit of money. He had to compensate the bloke. The money got him out of gaol straightaway."⁶⁵

By the time Con joined Ringling in 1925, the form and content of his act was more or less established for years to come. Perhaps only the cape dance remained to be perfected at that stage and even that was not long coming. The cape dance certainly enhanced what was already a visually appealing and exciting act. Picturesquely dressed in toreador costume, Con would advance into the circus ring and with his scarlet capo made the traditional passes at the imaginary bull. So vivid was the mental image evoked that the audience saw not a circus ring but the sun drenched arena of a Spanish town and the ritual and pageant of an actual bullfight. Then he mounted the wire to perform his tangos, jotas and fandangos with the unsurpassed grace of a prima ballerina. This dance was interrupted by a somersault and while making the turn in the air he stripped off his loose silk trousers and regained his foothold on the wire in silver knee breeches. It was his final trick, the amazing forward somersault, that was still the climax of his act. All the time, his performance was marked by intense concentration and a sense of style.⁶⁶

Con always received tremendous applause when he came into the Ringling center ring. Recalled Mickey McGeehan: "It was just resounding, tremendous. The tent would almost go up, there'd be so

much applause. I'm not exaggerating. They just loved him, whistled, stamped, everything. He dressed in a matador outfit and, first, he threw his cape off that Winnie caught. Then she graced it and threw it over her arm very, very beautifully and gracefully. She got a hand for it and Con would applaud too. Then the next was his hat. He'd throw his hat down. She'd catch his hat with one hand and it would twirl around and we'd applaud that too. The next thing would be his belt. He wore a big gold belt, about a seven inch gold belt. He would do a crutch-to-feet 'back' or a feet-to-feet



'back' [and] he'd [unbuckle the belt] as he did a somersault. He would do this with such grace and charm and ease that you would wonder how in the name of heavens a person could exert himself to such an extent. But he did it, and did it right on the nose practically. Winnie would catch that and then she would catch his [matador] pants and now he was dressed in a torero's outfit. At each undress the audience would applaud.⁶⁷

What was Winnie's place in the act?

"Winnie was the dressing of the act. She was beautiful and she came in and styled and then Con came in and they always favoured each other. She would style to him, he would style to her. They'd say almost, 'When's the act's going to start?' [I'm] only kidding, but I mean, they loved each other so much it was just pitiful really. Her job, really, besides being a silent mistress of ceremonies was to bow and style to the crowd and then to style to Con. Con would style to her and then the band would pick up. Merle Evans would pick up. Con would recognise Merle and turn around and zoom [up onto] the wire he'd go, down the wire and then do a Spanish dance. Then Con would, after that dance, back up to the pedestal, style [and] reap tremendous applause. The next routine after he had finished the dance, the styles and all that, he would move out."

When Con reached the main part of his act everything dimmed and the spotlight hit him. The band played a drum roll before each of Con's most difficult tricks but otherwise stopped playing so as not to disturb the intense concentration that he had to put into the performance of each trick.⁶⁸ Con ate only a very light meal before his act and refrained almost completely from alcohol. His dedication to his art was complete. When doing as many as five shows a day in European theatres, he could not even afford the time to take in the sights of the famous

The Ringling-Barnum performing personnel helped Con and Winnie celebrate their wedding in Detroit, Michigan on July 10, 1926. Pfening Archives.

cities that he and Winnie visited.

On the Ringling show, out of hours, everybody dressed casually, maybe just a shirt, pants and tennis shoes. Con loved golf, recalled McGeehan: "Con and I both loved to gamble. We didn't gamble that much. I mean, we gambled maybe \$5 or \$10. It was mostly in chips. One time, while I'm on this subject, we had a club on the show and it was a club for gambling. We had it in Con's room."⁶⁹

These sentiments were echoed by Con's brother-in-law, Eric: "They all loved him in the circus. Con had a big heart. He gave everything away and was loved by all the boys in the circus. He used to go down and play crap with them. And he was a top-line act. He never gave them that appearance. All the boys who put the tents up and put them down really worshipped him. They absolutely loved him."⁷⁰

Con became a keen home movie buff and recorded many moments on 16MM film with his own Bell & Howell movie camera. Much of this film has survived and gives a fascinating glimpse of the high life that he and Winnie lead during the 1920s and 1930s.

Europe

Con's lengthy association with the Ringling circus was only interrupted each winter when, because of the great show's lay up, he played the vaudeville theatres of America or toured the theatres and indoor circuses of Europe. When Winnie went away with him, she "dressed" the act and she made her various speeches in different languages, whatever country they were in. One of Con's first European engagements was with the circus of the English impresario, Bertram Mills. The following is the text of a letter dated

London, 17 January 1929 from Mills offering Con a return engagement for the 1929-30 season at the Olympia, London:

"Dear Mr Colleano:

"I shall be glad to enter into a contract with you for next Christmas for a period of five weeks at the same salary as we are now paying you, but without fares as I understand that you will be coming to Europe for a long period and that your fares would be incurred in any event.

"If these terms are agreeable to you I shall be glad if you will call at my office during the next day or two when contracts can be signed.

"I happened to mention the fact that Mrs. Colleano was a relative to the present Lord Derby to a member of the family, who, with a party, was at the circus last week. Lord and Lady Stanley are coming to the circus with Major C. Clarke [of Earl's Court Circus] next Tuesday evening and Lady Stanley has expressed a special wish to meet Mrs. Colleano and you.

"I hope you did not mind me mentioning the matter but I explained to them that you were very anxious not to make publicity of the fact and how charming you were about it and for that special reason Lady Stanley has expressed a desire that Mrs. Colleano and you will be good enough to meet them when they are here on Tuesday evening next.

Yours sincerely
(signed)
Bertram Mills"⁷¹

Con performed before Hitler and Mussolini, and received a complimentary passport and a medal from each dictator, respectively, for his efforts.⁷²

What did Con say about performing before Hitler and Mussolini?

"He never did say anything very much about it at all."

It was just another audience?

"Yeah, that's all, didn't mean anything to him. Con got three hundred pound sterling a week in Germany. Believe me, that's tremendous money. It must have been a thousand dollars a week or more."⁷³

Of Con's performance before the Fascist dictators, his widow Winnie was understandably a little coy at that point in her reminiscences:

I believe Mussolini gave [Con] a medal?

"Well, he got a medal through [Mussolini]. He didn't actually give it to him. And Hitler—I hate to talk about these people now because they turned out to be so terrible—but in those days it was an honour. Hitler was way up there in our day when we went to Germany. Con would always play the theatres in Germany. The German public were terrific audiences. Con was a big star in Germany. [Hitler]

supposedly said that Con was his favorite act and said he could come into Germany anytime he wanted. In those days it was an honour. It's not an honour anymore [after] what [Hitler] did."⁷⁴

1937

Several times during his career, Con and his wife came back to Australia. The first time, and perhaps the most memorable, was an engagement for the Tivoli circuit in 1937 for the patriotic revue show, *Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue*. Con's act, although essentially the same as when he had left Australia with it early in 1924, had been refined and polished with the years of international exposure in the great circuses and theatre halls of Europe and North America. After sailing from the United States to Australia by the *Mariposa*, Colleano opened at the Tivoli in Sydney on Thursday, 27 May 1937.⁷⁵ From Sydney, Con appears to have gone on to Melbourne and New Zealand for the Tivoli Circuit.

Was the act essentially the same in 1937 as what it was [when you saw it] in 1924 in Africa?

"He didn't have the cape in Africa. But he had the Spanish costume in Africa. I'm pretty sure he had never had these tight trousers on in Africa. When he came back here, of course, everything he had was so authentic and so beautifully beaded and sequinned and everything. I can always see this white shirt . . . just very nonchalantly falling that way. That suited him so well. . . . No-one else could have worn . . . clothes like it but he had the way that [just] belonged to him. He was so marvellous and still a nice person. I was so proud that . . . he hadn't got big-headed or anything like that. I remember the [beautiful] way he handled the cape when he came over here to the Tivoli. Con's showmanship qualities were superb. He just looked like a Spaniard and [he] knew what he was doing as far as his authentic cape dance at the opening of his act which was magnificent. . . . I'm pretty sure he was tutored with the cape. Another person . . . wouldn't ever have done it the way he did it."⁷⁶

Later in 1937, after finishing his engagement with the Tivoli, Con and Winnie and Winnie's two brothers and their wives took a two month camping trip into the Australian outback. For Con, it was his first encounter for fifteen years with the Australian bush that he had grown up in and loved as a boy.

In the two months that you were away travelling, did Con do anything to keep up his ability on the wire?

"Not a thing. No. Con loved every

minute of it. He really loved it. He got a hundred and fifty pounds [a week] here [with the Tivoli]. We went away on the caravan trip [and] Con paid for all that. We were chasing game. He lived off the land. He got, with his shooting, emu leg steak. I remember one night we were there and there was a mopeke, you know, 'Mopeke, mopeke.' None of us could get any sleep. You know, you'd just be dozing off. It'd go, 'Mopeke.' 'God, I can't get any sleep,' and neither could anyone else. And anyhow, as the thing was going, 'Mopeke' the next [thing you heard was] BANG! Con got out and shot it so we could get off to sleep."⁷⁷

World War II

By this time of course, the clouds of war were beginning to gather over Europe. Con and Winnie returned to the United States and, as was their custom, toured Europe in between engagements. Their last visit to Europe took place in the summer of 1939, beginning with a four week engagement at Berlin's Scala on 1 April.⁷⁸ One of the popular stories to have survived of their last visit to Nazi Germany is their exit from the country just as the outbreak of war was imminent.

As Con had been playing the Scala in Berlin during the summer of 1939 the chance came to play what had been the Munich Opera House. In pre-Hitler days, the Munich Opera House would have been beyond the range of a tight wire act. But Hitler, so the story goes, had decided that he liked variety entertainment better than he liked opera and had had the

Colleano in the center ring of the 1945 Cole Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.



house remodelled. Colleano, along with a group of English variety performers, was booked into the place to keep the Fuehrer relaxed for a couple of hours nightly during the anxious days of July and August 1939.⁷⁹ The performers lived through weeks of mounting tension. It was part of the daily routine of the performers on the bill to consult the British consul before going to the theatre. The Colleanos stayed until the consul told them that he and the consulate staff would be clearing out the following morning. The performers chose not to wait and to disappear that night. The Colleanos managed to obtain a lift with a driver who was willing to take them and their hand luggage to the Swiss border. They had to jettison their trunks and the Colleano wirewalking apparatus. The trip was free of incident apart from the presence of troops in every road and mountain pass leading up to the Swiss frontier.⁸⁰

"You couldn't take Marks [out of Germany]. They left everything they had in Germany, fur coats, rigging. They left five hundred pounds in a drawer bottom in their hurry to get out. Fortunately, Con had been very kind to the janitor and he rang him up and asked him [if] would he look for it. He did and he found it and he sent it to him. They got out into Switzerland [just in time]."⁸¹

From Switzerland, Con and Winnie made their way to Genoa where they were able to board a crowded ship for New York. Con's professional activities during World War II have not been fully documented but he is known to have appeared in Rio De Janeiro in 1940 and 1941; with the Holland Classical and Cole Bros. Circuses during 1942; with Shrine circuses during 1943 and with Cole Bros. Circus during 1944 and 1945. He appeared on Cole for several seasons in the post-war period.

Cole Bros. Circus

The 1949 appearance of Cole Bros. Circus to St. Louis was reported in the *Billboard* of 23 April and mentioned that: "Con Colleano having just returned for a successful European tour has lost none of his ability to warm up an audience. One of the top wire performers, Con Colleano, with an eye-catching wardrobe, gets the interest of spectators from the start and then bows out to thunderous applause with his forward somersault. . . . The St. Leon Troupe is featured alone in Place Six with a teeterboard. A six man troupe which appeared last year with Barnes Bros. and has played fairs, the act does its part to support the strong line-up. Their finale is a three high in a chair."

The St. Leons, descendants of the

Australian circus family whom Con had known in his youth back home, were in a reminiscent mood when I interviewed them about Con in Florida in 1985.⁸²

What do you remember of Con Colleano?

"Con Colleano was on that show and it was in his waning days. Con was still a great performer and a great tactician of the tightwire. However, this was 1949, right. So he was just about fifty years old and trying to do very difficult tricks at that time that young wire-walkers still couldn't do. He was fifty years [old] and still could do Spanish dancing on the wire that was absolutely beautiful to watch. It was more difficult for him to do it and I'm sure he didn't do it as well as he did it when he was in his twenties and thirties. It's a shame I've never seen that, but through just watching him at that age you could see what a tremendous performer Con Colleano was."

Did he still do his feet-to-feet forward somersault?

"Oh yes. He missed it maybe once or twice a week. He couldn't do it as perfect as he could when he was young."

Would he try it again?

"Yes, he'd attempt [it] again. . . . He'd do it 'til he'd done it right. . . . Yes, sometimes he'd miss it three or four times and finally finish it. He'd finish."

Did he ever injure himself missing it?

"Not that I know of. Not the time when he was with the Cole Bros. I'm sure every performer gets injured now and again but Con . . . was very agile. He knew how to fall in the wire [act]. He knew how to balance himself, so he didn't hurt [himself] as much. . . . You know, he was very, very good at it. Yeah, he was like a cat on the wire. [He was] a good-looking man and a tremendous performer. [He] had a lot of ring personality. When he walked in a ring he commanded attention. He did a Spanish, like a bullfight, dance with a cape. He'd swing the cape around. He could really handle a cape. He was better than most matadors I've seen. . . . Yeah, when you were on the show with Winnie⁸³ or Con Colleano you didn't miss many of their performances. You liked to watch them work because they were what you knew a performer should be. They were the exact examples of what a performer should be. That's why we called them 'the performers' performers. Everybody was out to see them work, because they were so great."

Con and his wife took out United States citizenship in 1950, possibly for income tax minimisation reasons.

Forbes 1956

At the end of their 1955 engagement with the Ringling circus, Con and his wife returned to Australia due to the illness of

Winnie's father. The couple went into the hotel trade in partnership with Winnie's sister, Carmen. After inspecting a number of country hotels they eventually settled on the Albion Hotel at Forbes, NSW. "World Famous Tight-Wire Wizard Now Businessman of Forbes" was how Con's new business venture was announced in the *Forbes Advocate* of 6 July 1956: "Con is an interesting and intellectual conversationalist, with a magnetic personality, and though not given to talking about himself--his valuable records are sufficient--the *Advocate* representative particularly enjoyed the entertaining chat with the renowned artist and the exceptional scenes of his worldwide experience. . . . Although Con will remain at the hotel, there is a strong possibility of his accepting engagements with the Tivoli theatres in Sydney and Melbourne, thus necessitating only temporary absences from his home and business."

People of an artistic persuasion usually possess little business acumen and Con and his wife proved no exception. Winnie's brother Eric recalled: "Winnie wanted to get back to her family because she loved all of us and wanted to be here. So they came back and brought a Cadillac with them with [a] left hand drive. I said, 'You'll have to get that altered.' Anyhow, I got it altered for them. A mate of mine from Kirby's changed it over. [It] cost them about 300 pounds which was a

Colleano performing with Cristiani Bros. Circus in 1959. Pfening Archives.



fair bit of money. Anyhow, they sold that. Anyhow, I went on my hands and knees, [pleading with them] not to go into this hotel. . . . They had no idea of running a hotel. They were all walking around and entertaining. Everybody [was] living it up and no-one [was] selling any beer. Con didn't have [a] clue. He'd never been in any business before. You know, in those family businesses everybody's got to work. And nobody did. I went up there and the place was packed, absolutely packed. They're playing ukuleles and pianos and everyone was singing. No one was selling any beer."⁸⁴

The big Australian circus, Wirth's, visited Forbes in June 1957⁸⁵ and when Con came down to the show to pay the company a visit he was given a warm welcome by everyone on the show.⁸⁶ By late 1957 Mr. and Mrs. Con Colleano were back in the United States, and Con once again performing on the wire. The year 1959 was spent with Cristiani Bros. Circus.

Honolulu, 1960

In his sixtieth year Con Colleano eventually retired from his illustrious career as a wirewalker. Failing eyesight, due to the onset of cataracts, was as much a reason for his decision as anything else. But the circumstance of his final performance, given in Honolulu in 1960, hardly befit the man who is still regarded as one of the finest circus artists of his time. Hawaiian circus enthusiast Kent Chirard remembered the occasion vividly: "In 1960 E. K. Fernandez brought in his biggest show ever in all the years that he brought shows in [to Hawaii]. It was sponsored by a church group and, [as] the big drawing card, it featured David Nelson, who was a movie star and singer, as the catcher in the flying act. That just drew the kids like flies. You can imagine. . . . Anyway, 'Diamond Jim' Parker and I were clowning on the entire run of that show. It was right here at the foot of Diamond Head in the park, a very beautiful setting. In the dressing tent the clowns were along one area there. Believe it or not, right opposite where I was putting on my make-up, was Con Colleano. Now, of course, I knew who he was. Let's face it, he's only one of the greatest circus performers of all time. But he was very, very silent. I never did say more than 'Hi,' I guess, all the time we were going in there and putting on our make-up and everything. Again, I didn't know what to say to him. You know, what do you say? . . . I didn't realize at that time that this was his last season with a circus. . . . He has always been the big centre ring attraction. On this show the low-wire display had three rings."

"On one end ring was a blonde lady [who] did a very average low-wire num-

ber. In the centre ring they put . . . a wild low-wire act with lots of screaming and yelling, an attention getter. In the other end ring was the great Con Colleano and nobody was watching. His type of act [was] a class act, basically a Spanish ballet on the wire but, because of all the yelling and screaming in the centre ring, everybody was watching the centre ring. I don't think I saw Con smile once in the dressing room or in the big show. I was shocked that he wasn't in the centre ring but when I saw the way the crowd reacted to the other [act] I could understand why Fernandez put them in the centre ring. I think it was a very cruel thing to even have had Con Colleano come at all. . . . Anyway, that's the sad story. There was no big fanfare about it being his last appearance. I didn't even know that it was. Instead of him going out with the trumpets blowing it must have been just about the lowest point in his entire career, to be treated that way, a man of his stature, to be put in the end ring and literally ignored by the people.⁸⁷

Final Years

After his retirement, Con and his wife settled in Florida. In 1966, Con received the supreme honour of the American circus world: admission to the Circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota, Florida. Very few artists have achieved this honour and only two Australians besides Con; his sister, Winnie, a famous trapeze artiste; and the great equestrienne May Wirth.⁸⁸

In everything that Con had performed on the wire in the course of his illustrious career, there had been an integrity and style found only amongst the greatest performers.⁸⁹ He had brought a new excitement and aesthetic satisfaction to the circus.

Con Colleano died of a heart attack on Tuesday, 12 November 1973 at his home at 8282 124th Street SW, South Miami, Florida. He was 73 years of age.⁹⁰ His widow, Winnie, died at a private hospital in Sydney, NSW on 5 January, 1986.⁹¹ She was aged 86 years. I saw her only a few days before she died, cheerfully facing the inevitable, and still in love with Con.

A Poem

Con Colleano
King of The Tight Wire
By Charles F. Clarke

The somersaulting acrobat
Who dances on the wire
Bedecked in Spanish splendour bright
In toreador's attire
A marvel of dexterity
A wind-tossed, swaying reed
Who's lightning balance, grace and dash

At whirlwind super speed
Delights the eye, outwits the mind
Unparalleled, alone
He reigns supreme, the King of Kings
Upon the tightwire throne
If e'er I walk at the dead of night
In nightmare's horrid sleep
And have to cross the chasm of
Niagara's thunderous deep
Upon a glistening silver wire
Stretched taut, and bright to see
I'll pray the Lord one boon to grant
"Let Connie walk for me!"⁹²

Glossary of Australian terms and circus & other slang

Abo-Aboriginal; that is black native Australian.

Backblocks-Back country, sparsely populated country beyond the closely settled districts.

Boozer-Drinker.

Bush-Wooded country districts beyond the major towns.

Bushman-Person familiar with surviving on limited resources in the bush.

Kiddies-Young children.

Learned-Taught.

NSW-New South Wales.

Outback-Unwooded back country, very sparsely populated country far beyond any settled district.

Panto-Pantomime.

Qld-Queensland.

S. B.-Show business.

Spieler-Side show confidence trickster.

Squatter-Country landowner.

Witchety Grub-Australian native grub popular as a delicacy among the Aboriginal people.

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Mark St. Leon is a descendant of one of Australia's oldest circus families. He is the author of the first comprehensive history of Australian circus, Spangles & Sawdust: The Circus in Australia, Melbourne: Greenhouse Publications Pty Ltd, 1983. His most recent book, The Silver Road: The Life of Mervyn King, Circus Man, was published by Butterfly Books Pty Ltd in October 1990.

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Footnotes

46. *Daily Mirror* op.cit, and author's interview with Mrs. Winnie Colleano, op.cit, pages 204-219.

47. Mervyn King, op.cit.

48. *The Theatre*, 1 May 1923.

49. Mervyn King, op. cit.

50. Eric Trevail, op.cit.

51. Eric Trevail, op.cit.

52. Eric Trevail, op.cit.

53. Winnie Colleano, op. cit

54. George Perry, op.cit.

55. George Perry, op.cit.

56. Mervyn King, op. cit.

57. Iris Shand [1916-], op.cit.

58. *Variety*, 1 October 1924.

59. Colleano papers.

60. Winnie Colleano, op.cit, page 206.

61. Ibid. Con Colleano was the major attraction on Ringling for each season from 1925 until at least 1935. His subsequent confirmed appearances on Ringling were not until the seasons of 1946 and 1954.

62. Colleano papers.

63. *Detroit Free Press*, 10 July 1926.

64. Mickey McGeehan [1908-88], op.cit.

65. Eric Trevail, op.cit.

66. This florid description of Con's act comes from *Circus: A World History* by Rupert Croft-Cooke and Peter Cotes, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1976, page 122.

67. Mickey McGeehan, op. cit.

68. Merle Evans, op.cit.

69. Mickey McGeehan, op. cit.

70. Eric Trevail, op. cit.

71. Original letter in the Colleano papers.

72. Article in *Pix*, a Sydney weekly pictorial magazine, 29 January 1938. The magazine devoted two double page spreads to Con's activities on the wire. This same article mentioned that his salary with the Ringling organisation was the highest ever paid to an individual performer, US \$1,000 a week plus expenses, equivalent to about 200 pounds a week in Australian currency at the time.

73. Eric Trevail, op. cit.

74. Winnie Colleano, op. cit, page 213.

75. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May 1937.

76. Iris Shand, op. cit.

77. Eric Trevail, op. cit.

78. Sunday *Call-Chronicle*, (Philadelphia?) 19 March 1939.

79. This is as reported in an American newspaper in 1943 [see following footnote]. A leading German circus archivist however, considers it unlikely that Con appeared before Hitler on this last visit to pre-war Germany as the Fuehrer would have been too busy planning and preparing for war.

80. This story is drawn from an extract from an unnamed Washington D. C. newspaper, dated 31 May 1943.

81. Eric Trevail, op.cit.

82. Clyde St. Leon [1929-] and Norman St. Leon [1931-], op.cit.

83. Reference here is to Con's sister, Winnie, not Con's wife.

84. Eric Trevail, op.cit.

85. *Forbes Advocate*, June 1957.

86. Joe St. Leon [1922-1990], op.cit.

87. Kent Ghirard, op. cit.

88. *Miami Herald*, 31 January 1966.

89. Antony Hippisley Coxe, *A Seat At The Circus*, London: Macmillan, 1980. Page 168.

90. *Miami Herald*, 15 January 1973.

91. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 January 1986.

92. Typescript in the Colleano papers.

The Great JAMES M. COLE CIRCUS

Part Two

The 1947 to 1988 Seasons

BY FRED D. PFENING, JR.

The first news of the 1947 James M. Cole Circus appeared in the January 4 *Billboard*: reading: "Albert Fleet set with J. M. Cole.

"December 28. James M. Cole announces he is well along with the booking of his 1947 big show program, which he says is shaping up in such a way as to keep all three rings busy most of the time.

"Albert Fleet, a wild animal trainer of recognized ability, formerly with Clyde Beatty, is to join with his two chimps, Mickey and Minnie, and a dog act, and will also work five show-owned lions, according to Cole. Latter arrangement is to be used instead of a cat act from Terrell Jacobs previously announced.

"Other acts lined up by Cole include the Morris troupe with a five person teeterboard act and comedy acrobatic act. Kirk Adams with two dog acts and two riding dog and monkey combinations.

"The Riding Conleys of seven people with three single principal riding acts and a riding dog and monkey in addition to their big riding act. Grace McIntosh to hold center

ring for her second season as featured aerialist.

"Lew Barton will work the show owned ponies and six-horse liberty act. He is due in quarters early in January to get the stock in shape for indoor dates, starting February 3.

"John Pugh, returning to quarters after the holidays, will head the elephant department and have charge of the menagerie to be added the coming season.

"Tama Frank will be back with his company for their second season as the concert attraction, featuring their Whirl of Death. Leon Bennett, with Cole the last half of the 1946 season, is to be back as side show manager."

"Shortly after the first of the year Cole wrote his friend Paul Van Pool: "I will have to play more cities tanks like I did this past season as the larger population centers this past year did better than the smaller ones. My nut due to increased

The James M. Cole Circus on the Penn Yan, New York fairgrounds May 26, 1947. Left to right, the midway and side show top, the marquee and menagerie and the big top. The dressing tent is at the lower right. The cookhouse tent was outside the photo. James. M. Cole collection.

side show top, menagerie and two more men on the advance is going to be larger than this past season, but I feel that due to the enlarged appearance of the show, it will draw more customers and instead of empty seats they will be filled more times if we get any break in moving, weather and the advance clicks. It sure is a gamble in this business, isn't it? The side show should win some money instead of losing money like last season, too."

Cole wrote Van Pool on January 16: "Well I believed Conley's line again. He wrote that he would rather be with us than anyone else. I will show you his bulletin when you visit, so I sent him contracts and then he signed with Mills. They will last three weeks on Mills.

"I will have Nellie Dutton. I like her and wanted her from start but took so long to deal with her through a booker but I cabled her so looks like she will come now. I sure hope so. Not many years back when performers would crawl to you for a job."

Cole played a number of indoor dates at schools in the upper New York state area.

The show lost a truck and a trailer in a freak accident at Palmyra, New York on February 24. Lew Barton was transporting a six horse liberty act and a pair of ponies to an indoor date. He parked the truck near the top of an incline after removing the animals and it was thought that a strong wind sent the vehicle downhill and into a tree.

Cole told Van Pool about the wrecked truck on February 28: "Last Monday my horse truck ran into a tree and was completely wrecked, so there goes all my profits for the five weeks of hardship and grief.

"I have a good pleasing show and really looks big in these schools. Liberty horses work fine and the bull has been swell indoors.

"Would appreciate if you can advise me regarding the loan as soon as I get back home, I have got to try to secure a loan some place, some how, as I have a lot of



work to be done and lots of people to take care of in quarters."

A *Billboard* article dated March 20 read: "James M. Cole, owner of the circus bearing his name, announced the contracting of his organization as featured grandstand entertainment for the Morris County Fair, Morristown, New Jersey. Previously announced was the contracting of the Mineola (N. Y.) fair for the second year.

"Cole also announced that Joe McMahon, assistant manager, will be back for his third season. McMahon is in quarters. Jack Priest is steward and feeding thirty-five people.

"Mrs. Dorothy Cole, who recently underwent a serious operation, is at home convalescing. Bert Pettus, side show boss canvasman, also will have charge of the elephant herd. Mrs. Pettus will do menage and aerial work.

"Acts already booked include the Acevedo Family; Flordelina Ortega, Brazilian wire walker; Walter Guice Trio, horizontal bar and trampoline acts. Paul Wolcott is to handle the Cole liberty horses. Al Tucker, formerly with the Ringling circus, also will join the staff.

"Cole said he will add a new stake and chain wagon and two new tractors. Show will move on 23 trucks, two more than last year."

The March 29 *Billboard* reported that Cole had leased four newly imported elephants from the International Import and Export Company. The bulls, all females, had arrived in Savannah, Georgia on March 7.

Rather than leasing them as the *Billboard* reported they were purchased by a third party and Cole paid for them over a period of time. They were named Dorothy, Elizabeth, Mary and June.

Terrell Jacobs did not provide the five lion act. The Dutton riding troupe replaced the Conleys and Albert Fleet did return for the 1947 season.

Charlie Lockier again decorated and lettered the trucks and the equipment made a great flash. The rolling stock included:

- Straight trucks
- #11 Panel maintenance.
- #17 Light plants.
- #22 Horse fair canvas.
- #23 Props.
- #24 Grandstand chairs.
- #25 Grandstand chairs.
- #- Cookhouse.
- #28 Ring curbs sand cross cages.
- #29 Seats.
- #30 Props.
- #40 Big top canvas.
- Semi-trailers
- #20 Planks.
- #21 Poles and jacks.
- #28 Sleeper and cross cages.



The 1947 Cole elephant herd, Dorothy, Elizabeth, Mary, June and Frieda. Jim Dunwoody collection.

- #36 Concessions.
- #41 Big top poles and jacks.
- #50 Ring stock.
- #60 Elephants.

The opening of the 1947 season was set for April 16 at Canton, Pennsylvania, the same spot that opened the 1946 tour. Cole and general agent Charles J. Myers laid out a route that would take the show through Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Virginia.

Following the opening in Canton, Pennsylvania the show moved forty miles to Williamsport for a two day stand. The fifth date of the season was at Hagerstown, Maryland on April 22.

James L. Harshman visited the show in Hagerstown and provided information that appeared in the May-June *White Tops*.

"The James M. Cole Circus opened its 1947 season at Canton, Pennsylvania, on April 16th and just six days later, arrived in Hagerstown.

"Jimmy Cole, one of the youngest circus owners in history, has spared no expense on his program this season. Performance compares with several of the railers in quality and some of the top acts include:

Nine double-deck banners fronted the 1947 James M. Cole side show.

The Riding Duttons, recently returned from winter dates with E. K. Fernandez in Honolulu; Flordelina, wonder girl of the tight wire; Grace McIntosh, featured aerialist; Young James Cole II, only seven years of age, working Frieda the big bull and Baby Dorothy the smallest elephant ever imported; the Bedell acrobats and teeterboard artists; the Dobas high perch duo; liberty horses worked by Lew Barton; and Kirk Adams' amazing dogs.

"That the James M. Cole Circus is the 'Most Beautiful Show in America' is now an established fact. We thought that the '46 show was an incomparable work of art, but the 1947 edition proves that Charles Lockier, circus fan of Auburn, New York, is the most versatile and gifted artistic painter of circuses existent. He possesses a tremendous fund of ideas plus the ability to bring those ideas to glowing life on the show's rolling stock. Particularly impressive is the prop truck which depicts a scenic view in the mountain and lake country around Penn Yan, New York, and bears the message, 'The Great James M. Cole Circus, Winter Quarters, Penn Yan, New York. The Switzerland of America, the Ideal vacation land, in the heart of the Finger Lakes region.' The new bull truck, finest on any show, bears wonderful scrolling in gold on red background with portrait of James Cole II with elephant and show title plus the words—'20 Tons of Entertainment; the



cookhouse truck; the light plants; the huge semi which carries the horses; the pole and canvas trucks, in fact, every piece of equipment is incomparably decorated. The whole thing is a photographer's delight.

The midway has pony ride; side show; pit show featuring 'Baby Dorothy,' baby elephant; and three or four show-owned concessions. Side show banners are brand-new and are large and double-decked making fine flash. Menagerie top is shining white and thus serves to accent the clean, well-cared-for appearance of the animals housed within. Menagerie includes four bulls, two cages, two llamas, and about one dozen head of ring stock. Fifteen or more new trucks and a star-studded program were Cole's biggest investments this season, but fans may rest assured the wild animal department will be enlarged in the future.

"As last season, the big top interior radiates color. Poles are painted a brilliant red, attached to the guard rails in front of each section of seats is white canvas bordered with red and embellished with JMC in huge red letters. Large blue pennants bearing the show title wave from the tops of the center poles. Comfortable wooden chairs with canvas seats, designed to hold two persons each, make up the reserves. Total seating capacity is nearly two thousand.

"Charles Cuthbert's eleven piece band dispenses fine circus music. The band is well-rehearsed and plays a concert before each performance as well as the after show. Calliope is on the bandstand this season and Frank Clark, CHS, does a great job at the keyboard. Too much credit cannot be given Charlie Cuthbert in his first season as a musical director. He has the musicians to cut it. Suffice to say, he knows his circus music.

"Clown alley includes a half a dozen funmakers headed by Billie Burke and Irvin Romig, Chas. LaBird, and Zeke Lamont. Wardrobe is excellent and the gang uses all the standard gags plus a few new ones. A very creditable job of clowning for a motorized show.

"Tama Frank and Patsy, impalement act, headlines the after show, which also includes the usual rope and whip acts.

"Show has a very attractive souvenir program which sells for a quarter and is loaded with photos and short articles. "General Admission is \$1.20 and 60 cents with reserves an additional 85 cents. Annex is 30 cents, pit show is 20 cents, and after show, 25 cents. The show has downtown ticket sale this year and



The Riding Duttons, a feature of the 1947 Cole performance.

newspaper advertising is impressive. Press agent Al Turner has been getting plenty of air time for the show and big and little Jim Cole are tabbed for radio interviews in nearly every stand.

"Staff—James M. Cole, owner and managing director; Dorothy H. Cole, treasurer; Charles. J. Meyer, general agent; Al Turner, press agent; Oscar Decker, brigade manager; Don Pysher, 24 hour man; Dave McIntosh, superintendent; Joseph McMahon, superintendent of front door; Frank Burns, big top canvas boss; John Heckman, master of transportation; John C. Beyea, chief electrician; Frank Whalen, boss property man; Charles Cuthbert, musical director; John Pugh, superintendent of elephants; Lew Barton, superintendent of ring stock and equestrian director; Leon Bennett, side show manager; Ayres Davies, side show boss canvasman; Maynard Visengard, superintendent of reserved seats; M. E. Hanley, cookhouse steward and J. E. McNeil, superintendent of concessions.

"Equestrian director Lew Barton has show moving in mid-season form with no hitches or delays what ever. Cuthbert's

Charlie Cuthbert and his 10 piece big show band in front of seat truck No. 29 in 1947.



band doesn't miss a cue."

Harshman made this listing of the performance in Hagerstown.

"1. 'SPANGLELAND' Tournament—all stock and performing personnel in a colorful pageant. Vocalist Marcelle Visengard renders *Temptation* and the show is on!

"2. Ring 1, Irvin Romig and his comedy mule Snafu. Ring 3, Morris Troupe of comedy acrobats and tumblers.

"3. Ponies and dogs in rings 1 and 3.

"4. Principal riding. Miss Dutton and Mr. Stutz. A pulsating exhibition of cartwheels and somersaults from horse to tanbark and back to horse. Young James Stutz flashes the form of a veteran and promises to develop into a truly great rider. The talented Miss Dutton displays charm and grace at all times.

"5. Clowns.

"6. Aerial web. Above Ring 1 Miss Dutton. Above Ring 2 Miss McIntosh. Above Ring 3 Miss Orr. Miss Visengard sings *A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody* during this number.

"7. Elephants. James M. Cole II, only seven years old, performs like a trouper as he works the giant Frieda and Baby Dorothy. Frieda does most of the routines but the punk is learning fast. The other three bulls do not perform as yet, having recently been imported and not yet schooled.

"8. Concert announcement.

"9. Kirk Adams' two great dog acts in Rings 1 and 3. You have to see it to believe it. Dogs climbing perpendicular poles, skipping rope on hind legs, balancing on forelegs, etc.

"10. Clowns.

"11. Grace McIntosh, single traps, finishing with fifty complete revolutions on the bar.

"12. Liberty horses in center ring, worked by Lew Barton. Act was as purchased from Bell Bros. by Cole this winter and is definitely a big investment. Barton does a superb job with the group of six. Horses wear numbers and are decked-out in colorful plumes. Kirk Adams' ponies in Rings 1 and 3.

"13. Ring 1 A great aerial perch act. The Dobas Duo, Joe and Annette. An outstanding act on any show. Ring 3 Contortion by Miss Dutton.

"14. Clowns.

"15. High school horses. Ring 1 Tama Frank. Ring 2 Lew Barton. Ring 3 Patsy Frank. Finishing with Lew Barton and Trixie on hippodrome track.

"16. The Riding Duttons. A beautiful beautiful wardrobe and beautiful horses. A top

act and garnering plenty of plaudits everywhere.

"17. Second concert announcement.

"18. Clown prize fight worked to perfection.

"19. Flordelina, Brazil's Queen of the Wire. Brings the customers literally out of their seats. Using no umbrella, pole or balancing device of any kind, this Latin American miss brings nostalgic memories of the great Bird Millman. A terrific presentation.

"20. Juggling by Jimmie Stutz. Clown walk around.

"21. The Bedell troupe of teeterboard champions. A great closer to a great show."

The circus went back into Pennsylvania at York on April 24 and stayed in that state until the 30th and then played four stands in New Jersey before going back to New York at Endicott on May 16.

The May 24 *Billboard* contained this report: "Hazelton, Pennsylvania, May 17. Despite extremely cold and windy weather, wait paper put up by another show, and day and date with Endy Carnival, the James M. Cole Circus drew two full houses Saturday (10).

"Show has been running into a lot of bad weather, getting snow at Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, Friday (9), but business has been good. Show played to a straw house at Tamaqua despite the snow storm."

The May 31 *Billboard* told of additional weather problems for the Cole show: "Endicott, New York, May 24. The James M. Cole Circus overcame threatening weather, plus a bus strike, to chalk up two big gates here Friday (16). The matinee was an overflow, while a full house was on hand at night.

"Sponsored by the Endicott Rotary Club, officials feared the bus strike would raise havoc with attendance since the buses serve Endicott, Johnson City and Binghamton. For the matinee, many private trucks were used to transport the school children.

"A two-day engagement at Scranton Pennsylvania, proved okay, show drawing good crowds the two days despite rain. At Carbondale, Pennsylvania, Tuesday (13), the matinee was a turnaway and the night show played to a packed house. It was the first circus in Carbondale in three years."

The show played a long string of dates in New York, showing winter quarters town of Penn Yan on May 26. The June 3 stand in Amsterdam was lost as the lot was under water.

Jim McHugh of the *Billboard* visited the show in Troy, New



Cole bill stand for the Pottstown, Pennsylvania date in 1947.

York and published this report in the June 14 issue. "James M. Cole org drawing well despite tough weather

"Troy, New York June 7. Owner James M. Cole, of the circus bearing his name, took another step forward this year toward realizing his ambition to head a top-notch organization. Selling authentic circus from the marquee right through to the back yard, Cole has come up with a solid presentation. When caught here Wednesday night (4) in the eighth week of the season, quality has obviously paid off despite consistent bedeviling weather. Although motorized, Cole has constructed in miniature a facsimile of a wagon show. Whether his ambitions encompass a railroad show is unknown, but Cole is outspoken in his belief in the circus and its future. His wife, Dorothy, feels the same way and together they have accomplished wonders from scratch in a short span of years.

"I'm trying to give the customers a little more than they expect," Cole said. That, he intimated, justified his \$1.20 general admission, plus 85 cents for reserved seats. That's near top dough for a show of this size but the customers were noticeably happy and inclined to remain in

Cole 1947 semi No. 21 carried the big top poles and jacks.



large numbers for the concert. Kid's pay 60 cents for night shows. If they utilize a coupon they can catch a matinee for 40 cents.

"Cole got away to an early start in the second week of April, with the result that he has been first in at most of his towns. Although the weather has been anything but favorable there were tales of strawing 'em on many lots. The three-quarter house here added up to a nice take even though Cole was inclined to discredit it as being something less than average.

"The performance through out has a big show flavor. Show opens with a creditable spec which fills all three rings, with the elephants left over, for the wind-up. Most of the remaining displays fill two of the three rings and the customers, to catch it all, have to work a swivel neck routine.

"Show has five elephants, including the recently imported Dorothy, who stands only a head taller than James M. II, seven-year-old son of the owner, who works the baby, and big Frieda, solo in the center ring. Youngster has the cocky, poised assurance of an adult bullman and the natural appeal of the turn wows the audience.

"The Cole liberty horses, trained and presented by Lew Barton, work a lengthy routine smoothly and are nearly as good as the show personnel thinks they are. The Dutton troupe, with youngsters Ida Mae Curley and Jimmie Stutz, and the well known Nellie and her husband, present a fast riding act even though working with relatively new stock. The act's harlequin costuming is outstanding.

"Accounting for plenty of talent spread throughout the seventeen displays are the Dobas, perch act; Senorita Flordelina, wire walker; Kirk Adams' dog acts; Morris troupe, teeterboard; Irvin Romig and his mule, Snafu, and Grace McIntosh, aerialist. Joeys are numerous.

"Tama Frank and Patsy, in a western and knife-throwing act, handle the concert capably. Charley Cuthbert fronts for the able eight-piece band.

"Cole is gassing 55 pieces of rolling equipment, about 40 of which are owned by him. Units are dressed up like a wagon show, even to sunbursting on all wheels. A well stocked menagerie holds the public on its way to the big top, which has a capacity of about 1,800."

The performance in Troy was as follows:



The 1947 light plant was in truck No. 17. It towed a two wheel trailer. Bert Wilson photo.

1. Spangleland pageant spec.
2. Cole's ponies in two rings ridden by monkeys.
3. Principal riding act; Ida Mae Curley and Jimmie Stutz.
4. Comedy knockabout and Irvin Romig and his mule, Snafu.
5. Elephants worked by James E. Cole II.
6. Clowns: Romig, La Bird brothers, Zeke Lamont, Blinkie Hoffman and Billie Burke.
7. Webs.
8. Cole's liberty horses, worked Lew Barton; Teeter ponies in end ring.
9. The Dobas, perch; Miss Orr, contortion.
10. Cole's high school horses.
11. Kirk Adams' dog act in two rings.
12. Double and single traps.
13. Clowns.
14. Dutton's riding act.
15. Senorita Flordelina wire walker.
16. Clown walkaround.
17. Morris Troupe, teeterboard.

The show played Auburn, New York on May 28. The following day the local paper published an after notice reading in part: "The big top of the James M. Cole Circus was filled to the doors last evening, and many people stood to watch the fast moving performance. It was a capacity audience and a satisfactory show, from the opening pageant to the 'after show,' which featured a knife throwing act and the customary wild west riding and roping.

The circus program was made up chiefly of stock but always favorite features. There was a long but exceptionally clever dog act, deft comedy acrobats, a huge performing elephant and little Dorothy, also an elephant, in the arena together, and put through their paces by tiny Mr. Cole, youngest of the circus family.

"Smart horses, well trained, pranced



The panel truck carried tires and other maintenance needs in 1947. Burt Wilson photo.

around with precision, agile girl performed on trapeze, the clowns staged a ball game and a boxing match, bareback riders gave graceful performances, crackerjack vendors sold many packages 'with a prize in every one,' the small band played with great energy—especially the trumpet men and the snare drummer, and there was animation all the time. Featured along with the Five Bedells, stars of the tetterboard who have real showmanship, was an attractive senorita who was graceful, daring and much at home on the tight wire.

"Everyone seemed well pleased with the Cole circus. Without great pretension in general equipment it presented an array of pleasing and well executed acts."

A two day stand was played in Glens Falls on June 5 and 6. Cole remained in New York heading west until June 20. On June 12 Cole and his son suffered lacerations when the tractor-trailer carrying the show's baby elephant failed to negotiate a turn in the road two miles from Schuyler Lake, New York on the way from Oneonta to Utica. The elephant was not injured.

Cole wrote to Van Pool from Chicago on July 1 saying: "I had a nervous reaction and shock from the accident and had to leave the show. I was in Conneaut [Ohio] all last week and came in here Saturday night. I can hardly get around and my side and back pain and bother me all the time.

"Mrs. is running the show and it seems to be moving okay but business is very bad. The bottom seems to have fallen out all over the country."

The show played Corry, Pennsylvania on June 21 and then went into Ohio at Conneaut on June 23 for five dates. On June 28 the show was in Michigan where it remained until July 19. The show was in LaPorte, Indiana on July 21 and then made a sixty mile run to Chicago Heights, Illinois.

The July 12 *Billboard* carried this report: "James M. Cole gets full night house at Sturgis, Mich."

"July 5. Favored with ideal weather—it was 80 in the afternoon for the matinee and 70 at night—the James M. Cole Circus did big business here Tuesday (1). Tent was better than three-quarters full for the afternoon show and packed to capacity at night.

"Just the opposite was true at Bowling Green, Ohio, however, June 6 when the show, despite the fact weather was near perfect, drew only two fair sized houses.

"At Bryan, Ohio, June 27, weather forced the organization to blow the night show. During the matinee, a heavy wind came up, accompanied by an electrical storm. So strong was the wind that it threatened to blow down the big top. Circus officials ordered the customers out of the tent for their own safety. An examination showed the wind had weakened the tent supports by loosening the stakes so officials canceled the night show and moved to Hillsdale, Michigan.

The July 5 *Billboard* dressing room gossip told of the Cole show activities: "All were pleased to learn that owner James M. Cole, his wife, Dorothy, and their son, James Jr. suffered no broken bones in their recent accident. Jimmy Sr., however, is still getting around with the aid of cane.

"In Fulton, New York the show was only 40 miles from King Bros. and those from our show going over for a visit included Dave and Grace McIntosh, Charlie Cuthbert, Ayers and Kay Davies, Joe McMahon and Irvie Romig. We have been getting some good breaks lately in the newspapers and on the air. Jimmy Cole is acting as his own press agent.

"Changes in personnel include the addition of Professor Farrell, replacing Happy and Marie Loter, to hold up the ventriloquist end of the side show; two musicians have been added to the band, and Holly Howard has taken over the light plant. Ayers Davies is making sec-

ond openings on the side show. Oscar Decker really can put out the eats when he has the help.

"Jimmy Stutz and Ethel (Rusty) Parent are doing plenty of hand balancing practice. The Morris troupe is developing some tricky routines with the double teeterboard and the air is full of the younger generation practicing trapeze and web."

The *Billboard's* Pat Purcell visited the Cole show in Chicago Heights, Illinois and published this extensive report in the August 2 issue: "July 26, James M. Cole Circus rolled into this suburb of Chicago Tuesday (22), a bit jittery as business had been bad through Ohio and Michigan, but the folks turned out in droves to give it a capacity matinee and a straw night; and many a critical eye was pleased with the performance even though it ran the gamut of tough luck through the night show. Jimmy Cole, as the lads call him, is in his second tour since being discharged from military service, and he has built an organization framed to please the public and to get money. Everything on the lot that takes in money belongs to the office, and all employees give you the impression that they definitely are with it and for it.

"On the midway, Jimmy has a side show under the management of Leon Bennett, a baby animal show, featuring a monkey and babe; a pony ride, and the customary novelty, floss candy and grab stands. He does not use a tax box, all cash being handled through the windows of the white wagon which is the personal domain of Jimmy's charming wife, Dorothy.

"The menagerie is confined to a horse fair, being filled with Cole's liberty act and the Riding Dutton horses. The five elephants are exhibited in the side show, featuring Dorothy, the baby elephant, which surely makes a hit with old and young. As one circus fan put it 'She's the sweetest damned thing I've ever seen.' The show also carries two cross cages of monkeys.

"The big show performance is offered in an 80-foot round with three 40s. Front grandstand has two-place folding bench-type seats, something a little different and quite effective. The back grandstand has chairs. There are three rings, and they were kept quite busy most of the time.

"Cole gained most of his experience under the redoubtable Charles T. Sparks, and apparently he learned his lesson well. His performance was well dressed, and the prop boys were in uniforms. He gets the most out of the talent available, a trait undoubtedly acquired from Sparks.

"The performance ran with precision despite the fact the Duttons were unable to appear in the matinee, cutting two feature numbers. At night the lights failed

during the menage number and the top was dark for some fifteen minutes. Charles Cuthbert and his band, featuring Maynard Visengard at the drums, kept the assemblage well entertained during this break.

"A truck carrying the Dutton horses broke down, delaying this troupe, but William Bausman managed to get it in so Ida Mae Kerley and Jimmy Stutz could work their principal riding act as the closing feature. These youngsters have plenty of talent and appear destined to become great stars of the big top.

"Flordelina, wire walker, tumbled at the conclusion of her act, her first fall of the season. This veteran performer works without any balancing apparatus and the mitting for her effects was solid. She was slightly injured and was assisted from the ring.

"Other feature spots were filled by Kirk Adams' well-trained dogs, Grace McIn-

This 1947 Cole newspaper ad contained a drawing used by the Clyde Beaty and Jay Gould shows in prior years.



tosh's fast trap routine; Joe and Annette Dobas perch pole; the Bedell Troupe, teeterboard tumbling; Irvin Romig's clowning, which veteran clowns say is unusually good, and Lew Barton's expert handling of the Liberty horses.

"James E. Cole II, aged 7, worked two of the five elephants, little Dorothy and big Frieda. The baby elephant trunks up and does a lay-down, while Frieda went through her routine with plenty of speed under the lad's guidance.

"Tama Frank has the concert, featuring his whirl-of-death knife throwing.

"In the two highly satisfactory audiences were several keen-eyed circus critics, such as Mr. and Mrs. Sam J. Levy, Fred H. Kressmann, Burt Wilson, Orrin Davenport, Mr. and Mrs. Orrin Davenport Jr., Earl and Hattie Shipley and Roy Barrett.

"The show is headed south and will be in Tennessee by next Saturday."

Nine stands were played in Illinois as the show went directly south entering Tennessee at Union City on August 2. Cole played four dates in Tennessee, was in Corinth, Mississippi on August 6 and in Florence, Alabama on the 7th. Three stands were played in Georgia and the show was in Chattanooga, Tennessee on August 16.

A ninety mile jump was made from Morristown, Tennessee to Bristol, Virginia, with a ninety-five the next day to Pulaski. These long runs did in the cookhouse truck which was off the show for three days. On September 1 the Cole show was in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and on September 4 and 5 it played Sta-pleton, New York.

The show laid off September 6 while enroute to Mineola, Long Island, New York for the six day fair date.

The September 13 *Billboard* told of the show's playing the Mineola fair: "With thousands of competitive exhibits, commercial displays and special new features, the 105th annual Mineola (Long Island) fair gets under way on Tuesday morning (9) for a five day run, ending Saturday night (13).

The James M. Cole Circus is scheduled for the front of the grandstand. The circus will be presented in its entirety, with menagerie, side show and concert. Performances will take place under the regular canvas big top with one-half of the tent open, permitting spectators to view the show from comfortable grandstand seats under cover. The method of presentation is brand new and the experiment will be surveyed with interest by showmen. Owner James Cole, a veteran of World War II will be host to some 1,000 veterans from Long Island and Staten Island hospitals and rehabilitation in-



The 1947 Cole big top canvas truck No. 40 was a former Army unit. Burt Wilson photo.

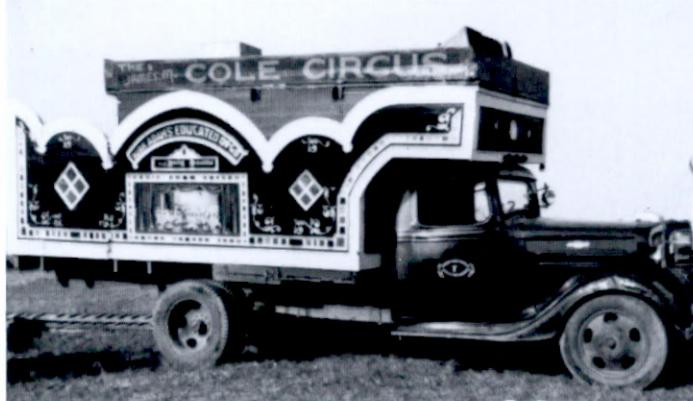
stitutions at the opening performance Tuesday afternoon (9)."

While playing the fair date Cole made the announcement that he planned to sell his circus. The report came in the September 20 *Billboard*: "September 13. James M. Cole, whose circus has been the grandstand attraction at the Mineola fair the past week, is winding up his affairs and closing the show after tonight's performance. Although business at Mineola was good, with near capacity houses of well over 2,000 at all performances, Cole finds piloting a tent circus at present has too many headaches and he is offering his big top, tents and rolling equipment for sale.

"Cole will retain the well-trained liberty horses and elephants and will hold some members of his organization with the intention of re-entering the indoor circus promotion field, in which he has had considerable experience.

"The James M. Cole Circus played its final stand under unique conditions, being one of the first, if not the only, circus to present a complete three-ring circus un-

Kirk Adams' dog truck had been on circuses as early as Walter L. Main in 1937. John Van Matre photo.



der canvas in front of a grandstand. One-half of Cole's big top was set up on the farside race track, with center poles and aerial rigging securely guyed off with heavy steel cables and ropes to stakes planted solidly in the lawn fronting the grandstand. No artificial light was required for matinee performances,

but at night the regular lighting system of the circus was supplemented by a battery of floodlights on the grandstand which proved very effective. The half of the big top was equipped in usual fashion, with bandstand and performers' entrance in the center and two sections of seats, which were not used, on each side.

"Menagerie tent was pitched along side the entrance to the grandstand while the side show tent was set up on the midway where it worked as part of the carnival set-up. Grandstand seated around 3,000 and circus drew well over two-thirds capacity at all performances and probably played to capacity at last night's and today's performances as weather was ideal, and Friday and Saturday are the peak attendance days at Mineola. Admission rates were adults, 60 cents plus 75 cents for reserves at matinees 75 cents plus \$1 at night; children, 30 cents plus 25 cents for reserves at matinees; 40 cents plus 23 cents for reserves at night.

"Line-up of acts was the same as on tour, and performances went off smoothly. Concert was canceled after first performance as fireworks displays followed immediately after end of the night performances."

Another article appeared in the same issue: "September 20. The James M. Cole Circus, grandstand attraction at the Mineola fair last week, proved the biggest drawing card ever playing that annual.

Opening Tuesday afternoon (9), the circus played to near capacity matinees and nights through Thursday (11).

"Friday night (12) the gate was so big that not only the 3,000 grandstand seats were occupied but the overflow filled the four sections of seats in the half of the big top

which had been erected on the far side of the race track. Despite this the lines continued to form at the ticket wagon and box offices and it was decided to put on a second performance which was also a sell-out.

"Saturday matinee (13) was also a sell-out and at the final night performance the grandstand, all four sections of seats in the big top and the lawn in front of the grandstand were jammed Saturday night's (13) performance was televised by NBC—under unique conditions. As the performance took place under one-half of the big top, with only half the canvas up, it was possible to televise performers and audience under ideal conditions and in such a manner that camera and equipment did not block the view of spectators in the grandstand.

"The circus also crashed several radio programs, the biggest break being the guest appearance of seven year old James E. Cole II and the baby elephant he handles, on George C. Putnam's news broadcast over Station WOR Thursday night (11). Young Cole and the elephant created a sensation in getting to and from the studio, where they arrived in a comparatively small car.

"Cole closed after Saturday night's (13) performance, with stock and equipment going on to winter quarters at Penn Yan, New York. Cole is offering his circus equipment for sale but is retaining his performing horses and elephants and will make a bid for indoor and outdoor dates under sponsorship."

The September 27 *Billboard*'s dressing room gossip column told of the final days of the season: "Season's last long jump caused the anticipated amount of delays and trouble, but we made it and opened on time in each of the towns. Late arrivals in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, found Mr. and Mrs. George Barton and Mrs. Barton Sr., mother of Lou and George, awaiting our arrival. At Doylestown a big visitor turnout included Mr. and Mrs. Howard Y. Bary, Irvin B. Romig and Roy Romig, grandfather and uncle, respectively, of Irvin; and Joseph Conway, Rio Bros.' Circus. At Stapleton's Staten Island Stadium we at last found the perfect lot. Uncle Don, of radio note, was an added attraction. Bert and Juanita Cole visited, as did Paulette San Marchie and Agnes Maier.

"We gave a benefit show at the Halmar Veterans' Hospital, Stapleton. Tama Frank and Patsy, the Dobas Duo, Irvin Robin and Snafu, Dorothy, the elephant, and the writer made up the program.

"Grand finale was at Mineola fair. Destinations of members: Kay and Ayers Davies return to Illinois before taking out the school show this year accompanied by Tama Frank and Patsy; Tex Maynard (Vienggaard) taking out a hillbilly show

through New York; Charles Cuthbert, band leader, has several fair dates to play and then will return to his home in Elmira, New York; Kirk Adams will play a few fairs with the L. T. Shows before returning to his home in Daytona Beach, Florida; Oscar Decker, steward, who entertained his mother during our stay in Mineola, will return to Newburg, New York to open a restaurant; Joe Scharoun will join Jim Bagwell's Dorman Bros. Circus; Dave and Gracie McIntosh will visit Dave's father in Nova Scotia and then return to Penn Yan, New York."

The home run to winter quarters was 375 miles. The total mileage for the season was 5,685. Thirteen states were visited, showing in 116 towns.

James M. Cole placed an ad in the October 18 *Billboard* offering three young female elephants for sale or lease.

On October 28 Cole wrote Van Pool: "After what you say regarding Kelly-Miller making over \$150,000.00 with their show it makes me more sold that I should get out of the business and that I know nothing about running one because if they made that kind of money in size towns they played and I am sure they don't bill any stronger than we did they really know a lot of things about the business that I sure don't."

"The reason I paid good wages was in hopes that people would work harder for me and the show and help to make it a success but instead they did less and got big headed, ninety percent of them. This is the truth, I had to leave the show several different times to keep from really killing or at least hitting them in the head with an iron stake. Therefore, Mrs. Cole and my son who has to go to school want me to get out before I have a complete nervous breakdown over them sons of _____!"

"Dorothy refuses to travel anymore and I don't blame her. We put up with plenty and no loyalty what so ever. Even the Duttons. Paul you have to troupe and live with these characters in the business now a days to see what they really are. Until the ass is out of their pants they won't be worth anything to any circus manager."

"I don't need a partner, if Bud [Anderson] wants to pay for the show he can have it all. I have plenty who want to be my partner and put in a few lousy bucks. I have put in \$105,000.00 in this show and will sell it with three bulls, horses, ponies, etc. Just keep Frieda and Baby Dorothy, elephant truck and my indoor equipment which includes Dodge for \$60,000.00. If anyone will take my inventory list and themselves put a price on what they would pay for items listed, they would have be surprised. Have had chances to give it away but I don't have to sell it and will let it rot before I give it to anyone. Let

them work like I have to build as nice a show."

Cole continued to struggle as to whether he wanted to sell his show. He expressed some of his thoughts in a November 4 letter to Van Pool: "Thanks for your nice letter. As your first paragraph states it [the circus] will die with fraud, crooks, etc. In fact

the truck show as far as it being a real paying proposition is already dead. People each year will start staying away from the motor show, some will be lucky of course, but on the whole they haven't much to offer like a railroad show. They started doing business after the rail shows began to disappear and the the war came, now you have four outstanding rail shows, Ringling, Cole, Beatty and Dailey and these are the shows that stir and excite the natives. The motor show has pushed around and given them less animals and performance and they will remember as their spending money becomes less. Of course I don't want you to broadcast my opinion as I want to sell my show. The family shows like Kelly-Miller and Hunts with large families and no nut will exist but a show like I try to give them on trucks cannot cut it. It still is a truck show to the natives regardless how good it looks and is."

"If I could have a fifteen car railroad show and put out a real horse drawn parade, I would have my old fight back and I would make money with it. But all I can do is dream, but will tell you this much I will keep trying towards that end. I plan to play smaller dates for a while and if I can get some fair contracts will and feel my way for the next year and see the turn of things. Of course if I do not sell I will probably take it out again."

"Well there will be another new show next season. Mickey Dale, grifter with King Bros. Dave and Deacon McIntosh have gone in with Loy who owns the King & Franklin show. They tried to get my show on the cuff, 10 grand down and the rest when I caught them. Dave got back last Saturday from the south where they made the deal. The show owns at present four trucks and a bastard size top-70 with two 22 foot middles. So they are going to use it for side show and get an 80 foot for big top."

"Dave wanted mine and I told him I was going to sell the show in one piece so he got put out and moved his house trailer into town."



Cole horse semi No. 50 was purchased from the 1946 Bell Bros. Circus. Burt Wilson photo.

"As you say, my show is worth what I am asking as I have everything, padroom, concession tops and stands, pit show, side show, menagerie, cookhouse, maskings, ring carpets, pennants and every pole stake, grub hole, mud blocks etc. are here. And it isn't junk and my canvas is in excellent shape."

Cole sold two of his small elephants, June and Mary, to Mickey Dales for his new show.

He had second thoughts about retiring from the under canvas circus business.

This report appeared in the November 20 *Billboard*: "Penn Yan, New York, December 13. James M. Cole, owner of the circus bearing his name, returned to winter quarters here after attending the outdoor show business meetings recently in Chicago, with plans formulated for a 1948 tour. Cole announced his decision to return to the road while in Chicago, although until then his equipment was understood to be for sale as a result of disastrous late routing through the Midwest and South which ate up spring profits and turned the season into a bloomer."

"While in Chicago Cole contracted new talent through the Boyle Woolfolk Agency. All new performer personnel will be added, replacing a program which, for the most part, has been presented for the past two years."

"New equipment includes a 30-k.w. caterpillar Diesel electric generator and a colorful marquee for the big top. The marquee was bought from the U. S. Tent & Awning Company. The big top canvas, all new this year, is in excellent shape. Cole also plans to add a stake and chain wagon this year, to eliminate the heavy loss of tools, including hammers and grub hoses, experienced this past season. A new tractor-trailer unit will replace the truck now used to transport the grandstand. Show will travel on twenty-one show-owned motor vehicles."



Semi No. 28 with sleeping compartment in front carried cross cages and ring curbs. Burt Wilson photo.

"Charles Meyer, general agent, and Joe MacMahon, assistant manager, have been re-signed for the third consecutive year. Leon Bennett will again manage the side show.

"Following the success of the presentation of his entire circus as featured grandstand entertainment at the Mineola fair last fall, Cole plans to concentrate on fair bookings, starting in late summer, 1948."

1948

The first *Billboard* report on the show read: "J. M. Cole To launch indoor dates February 3.

"January 18, James M. Cole announced five weeks of indoor dates to precede his regular season under canvas which will begin February 3 in Central School, Dundee, New York. He reports the Frazier Family (5) has been signed for the unit, the acts consisting on two slack wires, juggling table rock and perch. Unit also will carry three clowns, liberty act, menage, elephant, pony and riding monk, and llamas. The dates were booked by General Agent Charles Meyer.

"Meanwhile, Charles Lockier is continuing decoration of the outdoor equipment. He created especially effective designs for the elephant van and stock semi. The addition of three new semis, for side show, concessions and props, increased the number of show-owned units to 28, according to Cole.

"A shipment of monkeys has been received from Trefflich of New York for the menagerie. Kenneth Van is preparing stakes and poles for the new side show canvas being made by U. S. Tent & Awning Company, Chicago. Last year's side show top will be used for the menagerie.

"Cole announced that Flordelina Ortega, Brazilian wire performer, has signed contracts for the outdoor season. Maynard Visengard will return as superintendent of reserved seats. Marcille Vi-

sengard will return as soloist with the band, which will be fronted by Charles Cuthbert. Other personnel includes Joseph McMahon, returning as superintendent of front door; Joseph Schraoun, front door and purchasing agent; and George Griffin and Bud Greenwood, reserved seat ticket sellers."

While moving to a Shrine date in Worcester, Massachusetts from Penn Yan the elephants made an unscheduled stop in Syracuse on January 15 due to the extreme cold. They were taken to a local garage to thaw out over night before resuming their trip.

On January 24 the Mineola fair announced that it had signed the Cole show for a return engagement from September 14 to 18. The return was prompted by turn away crowds in 1947. For the first time there had been almost as many paid admissions at the grandstand as at the main gate. Cole said he would book a large wild animal act to augment the circus for this engagement.

In February Cole announced his staff for the 1948 tour. Cole and his wife, Dorothy were to be manager and treasurer, respectively. Others were Charles J. Meyer, general agent; Harry Kackley, contracting agent; J. E. Hill, brigade manager; Bill Nippo, 24-hour man; Carl Wyche, big top boss canvasman; Joseph Robinson, superintendent of light plants; Blackie Abbott, prop boss; Leon Bennett, side show manager; Norman Anderson, superintendent of concessions; Frank Murphy, reserved seats superintendent; Lewis Welford, tax box; George Gifford, downtown ticket seller; George Foster, bannerman; and Charlie Mackey, side show ticket seller. George Bell had been signed as big show band leader.

Charles Lockier, boss painter, was redecorating the advance trucks with red, white and blue designs. The advance was to travel in three units and post special pictorial paper, including billing for James M. Cole Jr., who would again be featured in the big show performance as the world's youngest elephant trainer. Sonny Cole was then eight years old.

Paul Van Pool had advised Cole that he was planning a trip to Penn Yan in February. Cole wrote him on February 6 saying: "I was pleased to receive your card advising that you will be here on the 14th and 15th."

On March 6 Cole wrote Van Pool:

"Thanks very much for taking care of the license for me. I didn't get a chance to fill out all the title information on these papers because I had to send the titles to you yesterday." From this it would appear that Van Pool was obtaining Missouri plates for the Cole trucks.

On March 20 Cole announced that he had contracted his organization as the featured grandstand entertainment for the Morristown, New York county fair. He also reported that Joe McMahon, assistant manager, would be back for his third season. McMahon was in quarters where steward Jack Priest was feeding thirty-five people. Mrs. Dorothy Cole, who had recently undergone a serious operation, was at home convalescing.

Bert Pettus, side show boss canvasman, also was to have charge of the elephant herd. Mrs. Pettus was do menage and aerial work. Acts already booked included the Acevedo Family; Flordelina Ortega, Brazilian wire walker; Walter Guice Trio, horizontal bar and trampoline acts; and Paul Wolcott, to handle the Cole liberty horses.

Cole said he would add a new stake and chain wagon and two new tractors. Show was to move on twenty-three trucks, two more than the prior year. A new 30 kw diesel light plant had been received from the Caterpillar Company.

While work progressed in winter quarters Cole and his son had been appearing at his usual route of schools with the elephant act. The opening date for the under canvas tour was set for April 12 in Sunbury, Pennsylvania.

James Harshman was on hand in Lebanon, the sixth stand of the season. He prepared this report in the May-June *White Tops*: "The James M. Cole Circus officially opened the 1948 season at Sunbury, Pennsylvania on Monday, April 12th and the writer was privileged to visit it on the 17th in Lebanon. Once again the show lives up to the title 'Most Beautiful Show in America' and presents a fine program consisting of twenty displays. New to the show this season are the Acavedos, Jimmy O'Neil, the Wolcotts, the Harters, Marie Pettus, and the Bedinis. All acts have sparkling wardrobe and all property men are uniformed in red and blue uniforms. Jimmy Cole, perhaps the youngest circus owner in the nation, spent twelve years with American Circus Corporation shows and his organization reflects the tradition of Mugivan and Bowers of always holding the public in high regard and doing the utmost to make the patrons feel right at home. With a few breaks this season should prove to be a banner one.

"There are several new pieces of equipment this year including a new light plant and a beautiful aluminum diner spotted on the midway. No menagerie is carried

and the animal lineup includes a llama, monkeys, about twenty dogs, fifteen horses and ponies, and three bulls. Last season the organization had five bulls but two have since been sold to the new Dales Bros. Circus. The elephants are housed in side show which has seven stages and is presented in a top that is a fifty with 3 twenties. Admission is 30 cents and there is a good looking line of double decked banners. Big Top is an 80 with three forties and admission to the performance is 90 and 60 cents, with reserves an additional 60 cents. Among the smaller tops are a dining tent and a dressing top. Show carries a large mobile kitchen unit. Seating capacity is nearly 2,000 and reserve chairs are six high while the blues are eight high.

"George Bell leads a snappy seven piece band playing real circus music. There is no concert or at present.

"Opening week business was very satisfactory and there was a three quarter house at the matinee in Lebanon. There are not as many clowns as last year but they are good. Billie Hudson is producing clown with Cecil Eddington, and Bill Bailey."

Harshman made this listing of the performance.

"1. Tournament, led by Marie Pettus and mount.

"2. Pony and monkey in ring 1; Wollcotts' 4 pony drill in ring 3.

"3. Trampoline and horizontal bar acrobatics by the Bedini Duo

"4. Clowns firecracker gag.

"5. Marie Pettus, cloud swing

"6. Bull act worked by James M. Cole II, the youngest elephant trainer in America. Master James is only eight years of age but he possesses the showmanship of a seasoned trouper as he works Freida, baby Dorothy, and baby Elizabeth. Act climax comes when a 1948 Chevrolet is driven into the center ring the doors opened on each side, the front seat shoved forward and Dorothy, weighing 900 pounds follows young Jimmy through the car door and out the other side. I call this James Cole's answer to Lou Jacobs' midget car gag on the big one. Act ends with plank walk by Elizabeth.

"7. Clown toothache gag.

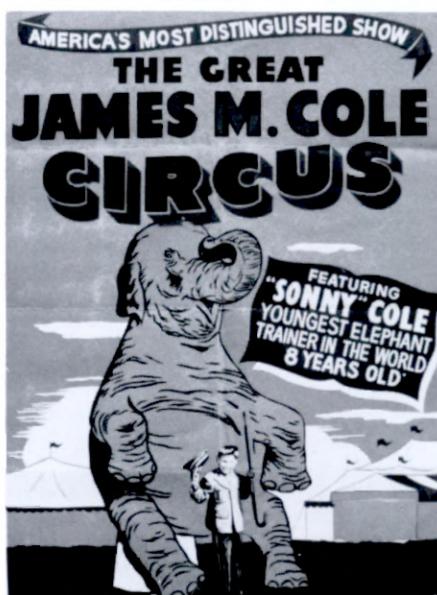
"8. The Acevedo Family wire act. Three girls and Bobby, the featured performer.

"9. Clowns.

"10. Menage, Lew Barton and his dancing mount Trixie.

"11. Flora Bedini's dogs. Announced as the 'World's Worst Dog Act.' the Boston bulls really run the trainer ragged but do several good rope-skipping and somersaulting routines.

"12. Jimmy O'Neil, tumbler extraordinary. One of the top applause getters, this intrepid young member of the Ac-



Central Show Print designed and printed this special poster featuring eight year old elephant trainer Sonny Cole.

vedos closes his pulsating act with a backward plunge from a twenty foot platform to a table, landing on his hands and springing from the table into a series of somersaults across the length of the ring. Must be seen to be appreciated.

"13. Two fine dog acts. Ring 1 The Wollcotts; Ring 3 the Harters. A number of the canines are costumed and one of the Wollcotts' dogs, an Irish setter, scales a perpendicular fifteen foot wall in one leap.

"14. Clowns.

"15. Equilibristic and balancing feats by a skilled duo.

"16. Juggling by the Acevedo Family. A superb presentation, skill, speed, and precision-timing combined with beautiful wardrobe and props help to establish this turn as a favorite.

"17. Clowns.

"18. Senorita Flordelina Ortega, the Brazilian wonder girl of the wire. The usual terrific presentation by this amazing lass who scorns the use of umbrellas or balancing devices of any kind.

"19. Clown walkaround.

"20. The James M. Cole liberty horses worked by Lew Barton. Six fine matched steeds colorfully decked out in gaily colored plumes on heads and backs present as fine an act of its kind as any on other motor show."

Harshman made this editorial comment, "On the debit side, the show needs more aerial numbers, web acts, etc. A bare-back riding act similar to those presented in the past by this show, would also help. Otherwise the personable and affable Mr. Cole has himself a splendid performance, devoid of the spectacular, but very entertaining and very colorful."

The James M. Cole Circus remained in Pennsylvania until entering New Jersey at Flemington on April 29. Princeton on April 30 registered a straw house at night and a capacity at night. It was the first circus to play the college town in almost a half century. The next day in Montclair the show had two capacity houses.

After moving exactly 1,000 miles since opening the show played Bayonne, New Jersey May 11 to 14. A *Billboard* reporter visited the show there and provided extensive coverage in the May 22 issue.

"James M. Cole, on 23 trucks, featuring elephants, horses.

"May 15. The James M. Cole Circus wound up a four day stand here Friday (14) and is heading inland into Pennsylvania territory. Show is motorized, traveling on twenty-three show-owned trucks and twenty vehicles belonging to personnel. Circus carries a four-pole big top, side show and menagerie tent, horse tent and cookhouse tent. Canvas and equipment are in excellent condition and show presents a very attractive appearance.

"The Cole administrative staff is headed by James M. Cole, manager; Joe Webb, assistant manager, and Mrs. Dorothy Cole, treasurer and office wagon manager. Line-up of personnel includes Harry Kackley, contracting agent; J. E. Hill, brigade manager; Don Pysher, 24-hour man; Frank Murphy, superintendent of reserved seats and taxes; Louis Welford, tax box and downtown ticket seller; Leon Bennett, side show manager, and Norman Anderson, superintendent of concessions.

The big top staff includes Bert Pettus, boss canvassman; Henry Abbott, property boss; Joseph Robinson, chief electrician; William De Clements and James Lemmings, mechanics; Lou Barton, equestrian director, and George Bell, band director. Jack Priest is steward of the cookhouse. Show carries four union billposters and an apprentice, with three trucks on advance.

"Outstanding features of this year's program are the three elephants and the liberty horses. Elephants, including a pint-size baby, are capably presented by 8-year-old James E. Cole II, son of the show's owner. Six well-trained horses are put through their paces by Lou Barton who scores with an excellent high school horse number.

"The Acevedas are versatile performers, appearing in neat tight wire and juggling routines. The O'Neils click in a trampoline number and Jimmy O'Neil does some unusual tumbling and barrel jumping stunts.

"Featured high act is the wire walking of Flora de Lina Ortega, a really good worker. The Martin Duo, equilibrists, are also good, and neat dog acts are pre-

sented by the Harders and the Wolcotts.

"Clown alley is headed by Joey Hudson, producing clown, assisted by Cecil Eddington and William Bailey. After concert is put on by Red Lunsford and his Congress of Rough Riders.

"Leon Bennett is in charge of the side show, with Dean Hopkins, ticket seller, and Wilbur Gable, boss canvassman. Line-up of attractions: Cleo, mentalist; Professor Bennett, magician; Frank Farrell, ventriloquist and Punch and Judy; Jean Harder, sword ladder, and the Hopkins (5) Scotch Bagpipe Band. The menagerie displays elephants, llama and several cages of animals."

The performance had changed some by the fifth week of the season. The running order in Bayonne was:

1. Tournament, colorful parade of performers and animals
2. O'Neils (4), trampoline.
3. Cole ponies and monkeys.
4. Cole elephants presented by James E. Cole II.
5. Aerial ballet.
6. Clown gag.
7. High school horse ridden by Lou Barton.
8. Acevedas, wire walkers.
9. Concert announcement, Red Lunsford.
10. Clown gag.
11. Jimmy O'Neil, barrel jumping.
12. Harder and Wolcott's dog acts.
13. Clown gag.
14. Martin Duo, equilibrists.
15. Concert announcement.
16. Acevedas (4), juggling clubs and foot routines.
17. Clown gag.
18. Flor de Lina Ortega, wire-walking.
19. Clown walkaround.
20. James M. Cole's six liberty horses presented by Lou Barton.

No mention was made in the *Billboard* report of Joe MacMahon who had opened as assistant manager. Also missing was the Flora Bedini dog act. Red Lunsford had joined the show to present the concert.

Mrs. Norman Anderson wrote Van Pool from Auburn, New York on May 31 about conditions on the James M. Cole show saying: "We were rained out Friday night the second performance we have missed so far. I think that is pretty good considering the weather we have had. You never seen rain like we had Friday. It came down in sheets and I mean literally. Business however still isn't so hot for the



Cole semi No. 27 carried seat planks in 1948.

show. Jimmy has made all the pay days so far but it is a constant wonder to me how he does it. Norman and I can't complain too much. We have made a little money but not what we had hoped to make when we came back here.

"We have been just ahead or just behind both King Bros. and Ben Davenport [Dailey Bros.] for the last couple of weeks."

The show returned to Pennsylvania for three stands and was in Endicott, New York on May 20 where the show encountered chilly weather in the afternoon but had a capacity crowd at night. The usual quarters town date was played in Penn Yan on May 26. The home towners did not give the show good business although it did not rain as predicted.

The next day in Canandigua the lot owned by the American Legion sponsor was located some distance from the city and as result business there was on the light side. Don Pysher, Cole's 24 hour

The midway of the James M. Cole Circus in 1948.



man, said the weather in Canandaigua was the best so far of the season. The show drew a three quarter house at the matinee, 600 of whom were patients from a near-by Veterans' Hospital. There was a half house at night.

The show had been plagued by rain most of the spring, repeating the weather encountered the prior year. A bigger problem was the difficulty of obtaining steady help.

Staying in New York state through June 5 at Troy the show then moved into New England for stands in Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire. Amsterdam, New York on June 4 provided okay business considering the weather. A last minute switch in lots in Amsterdam brought confusion but both performances drew strong crowds. A heavy rain fell before the matinee but stopped before show time at night and a three quarter house was on hand. The circus was met with rain in Keene and Claremont, New Hampshire on June 9 and 11 as rain followed the show during its swing of New England.

The show went back into Massachusetts at Newburyport on June 22. Business was exceptional at Gloucester on the 23rd. In spite of rains during both performances, a capacity crowd viewed both shows. The organization was the first circus in Taunton, and played to strong houses at both shows on June 28. Excessive heat and a thunder storm combined to hurt the show in Attleboro on the 29th where there were only half houses. Hunt Bros. played the town a week before as did four carnivals earlier in the season.

Cole went back into New York State on July 9 at Hudson. Ideal weather and satisfactory attendance were not helping the show get money. A scant crowd was on hand for the afternoon show in Rouses Point on July 21, followed by a near-capacity at night. This despite the fact

a carnival was just getting off an adjacent lot following a one-week stand and a fair was in progress in a nearby town. Rain just before show time cut attendance at the matinee in Potsdam on the 23rd, but there was a full one at night. Attendance was okay at both shows in Gouverneur on the 24th, although the matinee attracted only a half-house. Business was also satisfactory at Pulaski on the 28th.

The show registered near-capacity crowds at Delhi on August 3 and at Sherburne on July 31, after playing to a full house in Walton on the 2nd.

One of the few dressing room gossip columns of the season appeared in the August 7 *Billboard*. It read: "Show has encountered plenty of rain this season. It had good biz at Glens Falls, New York, Whitehall, Elizabethtown, Ausable Forks, Plattsburg, Rouses Point and other New York spots. Charley Kelly has been advanced and is doing a good job as chief announcer. Since Joe Mease drummer, left at Elizabethtown George Bell has been doubling on drums. The writer, who spent seven weeks on Hunt Bros. before leaving for a rest and visit at his home, joined at Hudson, New York. Red Lunsford and family are in the after show. Recent visitors included Mr. and Mrs. Harold Rumbaugh, Charles Hunt and family, Mrs. Jane Barnes, Mr. and Mrs. Al Bomba, Mrs. R. J. Fulton and many performers with the Hunt show. Roy Short."

The show played the Morris County Fair in Troy Hills, New Jersey August 16 to 21. The circus used the same set-up that it tried out the prior year at the Mineola, Long Island fair, raising only one half of its big top, leaving the side facing the grandstand entirely open. The unusual set up worked out satisfactorily at Troy Hills, as it had at Mineola.

Cole presented his regular performance twice daily and played to satisfactory business excepting Friday (20), completely lost to rain. Closing day, Saturday (21), was the biggest day for the circus, as well as for the midway and the fair. Cole's side show top was spotted in the exhibit section of the grounds. The show stayed in New Jersey for the rest of the regular stands of the tour.

The final date of the season was the return engagement at the Mineola fair from September 13 to 18. The September 25 *Billboard* published this report: "Cole gets good business as Mineola fair feature.

"September 18. The James M. Cole Circus winds up its season with a five day stand at Mineola Fair which closes tonight. Last year Cole initiated the idea of presenting his three-ring circus in front of the grandstand at Mineola, with only half of the big top up, and is using the same idea this year.

"Given good weather, this method is excellent, since spectators have better seating and visibility than from the grandstand. In case of a straw house, the overflow can be shunted to the blues and reserves of the half of the big top, which is completely equipped with the usual seats, bandstand and lights.

"Mineola Fair, as usual, started with fairly light attendance and will hit its

peak today, if weather remains good. The Cole Circus attendance increases in about the same ratio as fair attendance. Tuesday (14), opening day, drew an estimated gate at the fair of 35,000, which topped last year's opener by 13,000, and the circus drew near-capacity grandstand crowds at evening shows up through Thursday night (16), with matinees a bit lighter.

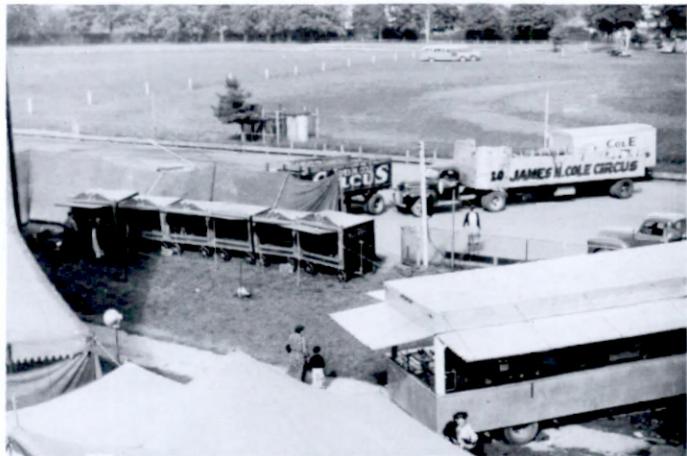
"Weather up through the 16th was ideal, but Friday was partially cloudy and cool, which probably cut fair and circus attendance some. Mineola grandstand seats close to 2,000 spectators, but for the circus additional capacity is provided by placing seats in front of the stand.

"Cole has brought in Prof. George J. Keller and his group of mixed animals as added attraction here, which necessitated revamping the running order of the program, since Keller's cat act followed the opening parade, and he appears in the number one spot with his zebra stallion. Keller presents a novel number using a black panther, lions, tigers and a leopard, which he handles well.

"Following Keller are: 2, the O'Neil Troupe (3) and the Morales (4), trampoline; 3, Col. Red Lunsford and partner, whip cracking; 4, Clown gag; 5, Cole elephants handled by eight year old James M. Cole II; 6, swinging ladders; 7, clown gag; 8, Lew Barton, high schoolhorse; 9, Keller's zebra stallion; 10, Acevedo Family (3 girls), wire act; 11, Jimmy O'Neil, barrel jumping; 12, Lew Barton, pony and riding monk; 13, clowns; 14, Colonel Lunsford and riders, roping; 15, Senorita Flordelina; 16, clown gag; 17, Acevedos, juggling; 18, comedy mule; 19, Cole's liberty horses presented by Lew Barton. Finale, Felix Morales, head slide.

"The show heads for winter quarters at Penn Yan, New York, at the close here.

"Personnel of the James M. Cole Circus by fast work succeeded in dropping the canvas and getting all props under cover before the gale winds on the



The back yard of the Cole show at the Mineola, New York fair September 14, 1948. J. R. Conway photo.

18th. Midway showmen and concessionaires also closed up tents and stand fronts before damage was done."

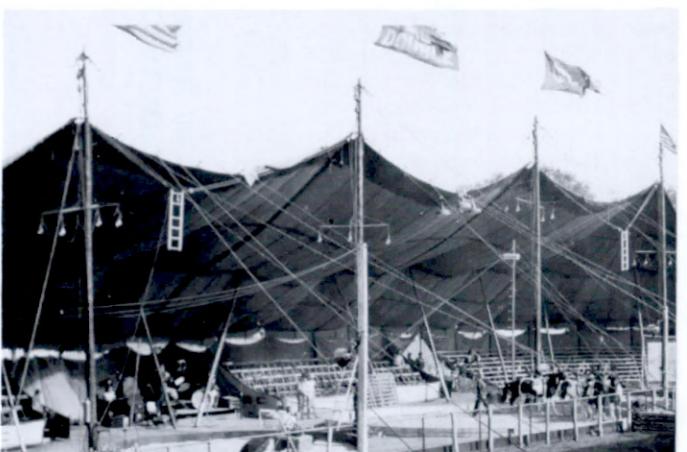
Although people on the show knew that the season was finished they did not know that James Cole planned to retire from the under canvas circus business.

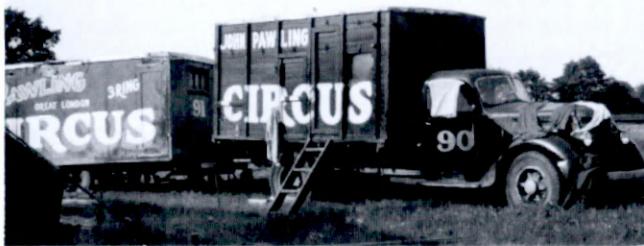
The November 13 *Billboard* brought news of the sale of the show saying: "Rumbaugh buys Cole equipment; to tour in 1948 PGL title.

"The James M. Cole Circus properties, in winter quarters here, were sold November 1 for an undisclosed figure to Harold J. Rumbaugh, former co-owner with Floyd King, of the King Bros. Circus and owner of the title to the John Pawling Great London Circus.

"According to Rumbaugh, the new circus will take to the road in the spring under the latter title. Penn Yan will be retained as quarters and a crew of workmen is already engaged in readying the show properties, Rumbaugh reports.

Half of the Cole big top at the Mineola fair on September 14, 1948. J. R. Conway photo.





The former James M. Cole Circus light plant truck on the John Pawling Circus in 1949. Don Smith photo.

"Jack Meredith is here supervising the building of six cage wagons, and Charlie Lockier has been awarded the contract to paint the circus equipment. Joe Myers is winter quarters superintendent. Rumbaugh says the new show will carry a menagerie and will be bedecked in all new canvas from front to back.

"Rumbaugh, before entering the circus business, was successful in the mercantile field on the West Coast, where he still retains extensive real estate holdings. He purchased the Bud E. Anderson Circus in 1946 and the same year entered a partnership with Floyd King by purchasing the Clyde Beatty Circus properties in Macon, Georgia, and merging them. The show went out in 1946 and 1947 as King Bros. Circus. Disagreement over business policies led to a dissolution of this partnership in 1948 with Rumbaugh selling his interest to King on a two-year installment payment plan, Rumbaugh holding title to the King circus property until final payment is made at the end of the 1949 season."

An interesting article appeared in the Penn Yan newspaper on November 5: "Call It a rest, Cole circus family to tour Cuba with big Santos show.

The marquee and side show of the 1962 Cole All Star tent circus.



"After a season under canvas, the James M. Cole circus has bedded down in winter quarters in RD 1, four miles southeast of this village at the Cole farm home near Mays Mills.

"The Cole family, James, Dorothy and Jimmy, Jr., will leave Penn Yan November 13, for a circus season 'south of the border.'

"The Coles with their famous 'Jimmy and the Elephants' act will go to Havana, Cuba, where young Jimmy, eight-year-old son of the circus couple, will be featured with the three elephants, Frieda, baby Dorothy and Elizabeth, in the Santos & Artigas shows, the 'Ringlings of Cuba.'

"The Cuban circus was established in 1916 and is a large railroad job, with dining car instead of a tent for the meals, and playing only one performance each day on its road tour, that in the evening.

"The local circus trio anticipates the trip to Cuba with pleasure. They will ship from Beach, Florida for the Cuban capital, November 21. The circus will play eight weeks in Havana in a palatial tent, richly carpeted, the tent made in theater style with balconies and similar arrangement.

"After the Havana engagement the show will travel by rail into the interior of Cuba to the big sugar plantations on some of which 12,000 natives are employed. The show will play right on the plantations in the evenings. The Coles will have a stateroom to themselves on the train during their 25 weeks engagement with the Cuban show.

"Special lithographing is being done for the boy and elephant act. The show is billing the Penn Yan boy and his three elephants as its winter feature. The Coles plan to return to Penn Yan in May.

"The Coles have planned a year's vacation after the grueling work of keeping their own show going for the past several years and the Cuban engagement will be in the form of a leave from routine circus life.

"The elder Cole has sold part of his show's physical equipment to Harold J. Rumbaugh, Everett, Washington, a former part owner of the King Bros. circus. In February last, Rumbaugh sold his inter-

est in that show to Floyd King and now plans to organize his own show.

"He has bought some of the James M. Cole trucks, all of the outdoor canvas, the light plant generator, all of which will give him a nucleus to start building his own circus. He plans a three-ring show to carry on with the same principles of the James Cole show.

"The Coles have extended to Rumbaugh the courtesy of use of their winter quarters while the former are in Cuba. So the business will remain in Penn Yan."

From Cuba on December 31 Cole wrote Van Pool: "Dorothy, Sonney and I are really enjoying it here in Havana and like the circus very much. The owners and their wives are very lovely people and very nice to us. Jimmy is doing fine with the elephants and is making a hit with them.

"It seems so good to get some rest and not have the strain I have had the past three years. No show owner ever went through what I did this past season with the four agents I had. If I do say so myself it was my own showmanship that brought the show through. Probably George Bell has told you some of the dirty double crossing suckers I had.

"We liked the Bells very much and they both worked hard on the show and for the show. Red Lunsford was wonderful too. I had a much better group back on the show this year than other years.

"We are leaving for road tour of Cuba on January 10. We will have played Havana by then for six weeks in one location. They really pack them in. We gave three shows Christmas day and three the next day, Sunday. I am going to miss our show very much and would have stayed in the business if I could ever get a staff, but just couldn't."

Following the six months tour with Circo Santos y Artigas the Cole returned to the United States and continued to work independent dates with their three elephants.

During the summer season of 1949 the Cole elephant act toured with the Jay Gould show.

Cole did not take his indoor school circus back on the road until 1950. An extensive article appeared in the January 3 edition of the Geneva, New York *Daily Times* reading in part: "Revival of the James M. Cole Indoor Circus on the 10th anniversary of its launching after a three year lapse was announced by James M. Cole Sr., Penn Yan's circus maestro.

"Featured in the new version of the indoor show set up for schools and similar auditoriums will be Cole's nine year old son, James M. Cole II, the world's youngest elephant trainer.

"Young Jimmy 'Sonny' has been touring the United States and Cuba for the past

three years with three performing elephants, Frieda, Elizabeth and Dorothy.

"The Cole indoor show will open February 1 at Naples Central school. The Penn Yan homecoming presentation will be held in Penn Yan Junior High school with the Cole circus showing March 20. Cole Sr., says he has a big place in his heart for Penn Yan academy, not only because he attended it but because Clayton E. Rose, superintendent of Penn Yan schools, was one of the first to confer with him on plans for an indoor circus, help him with his plans and assist him in making contacts with schools in this and other states.

"The indoor version of the circus will have twelve acts and is billed for A-1 theaters after March 22. It will open at the Shea theater in Ashtabula, Ohio.

"Lined up for the show are a troupe of Albino ponies and twelve Alaskan white huskies and Spitz dogs; Leo Albright, slack wire; and Burdell, an acrobat.

"Solidly booked for 25 weeks the show will play the Shrine circus at Syracuse April 10; Shrine circus at Binghamton, week of April 17 and then to St. Louis Police Circus for a two and a half week stand. The show will be part of the Omaha, Nebraska Shrine show and then return to the Jay Gould circus at Ottawa, Illinois for a summer tour of 18 weeks."

After being with the Jay Gould show Cole wrote on October 25, 1952 to Bill Woodcock Sr., saying in part: "I certainly do appreciate your recommending us to the Siebrand Bros. circus and carnival and for writing to us regarding their show.

"We had a very rough season with Gould and topped off with Elizabeth elephant getting tetanus poisoning and this has cost us over \$2,000.00 to save her, so we are really in need of a good steady season in 1953. And as you claim they give around 30 weeks, would sure help if we can get price we need to maintain our elephants and equipment year around. We would need to get \$700.00 per week, so would appreciate your advice if we could get \$700.00 or \$750.00. Our act is not as good of course as yours but with the boy it is pleasing. We keep our animals clean and well groomed and it goes over and they like him and his elephants every place we show."

Cole continued to operate his indoor show during the winter months. By 1962 he had changed the name of to Cole All-Star Circus. The 1962 indoor tour of eleven weeks opened January 29 in Tioga, Pennsylvania. The performance included Jack Campa, unicycle and comedy bike; Jean Warner's chimps; Cole's albino po-

nies; Buck Leahy, clown; Mike Gaasca, comedy acrobat; James Holm's collie dog act; Famous Rawls, rolling globe and bull whips; Mary Frazier, trapeze; Senior Miquelito, balancing.

In early 1962 James E. Cole II, then manager of the State Theater in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, approached his father about again taking out a tent circus. Young Cole was twenty-two years of age and full of vim and vigor. The elder Cole said, "Young Jim came to me and said he was twenty-two, strong and wanted to go



James M. Cole, manager of King Bros. Circus in 1966. James M. Cole collection.

back in the business with an under canvas show."

The decision was made that the Cole's All Star Circus would make a summer tour. The two Cole scurried about buying equipment for the new show. Photos suggest that it traveled on six or eight trucks. One semi carried the big top and seats. Another semi carried the elephant and ponies. In addition to the big top there was a side show and cookhouse top.

Early in April Cole placed an ad in *Amusement Business* wanting ground and aerial acts, an elephant act, an organist, high class promoters, side show, pit show manager or wildlife operator and a concession manager. He offered twenty weeks work starting with the opening in Elmira, New York on April 30. The ad also said that people joining the outdoor unit would be given preference for all winter work starting October 15.

The 1962 tour was confined to New York and Pennsylvania towns where the

Cole title was well known. On May 30 the show played Cole's home town of Penn Yan, New York. The show was in Baldwinsville, New York on July 16 and Granville on August 22.

The Cole show played the Middletown, New York fair on closing day in September. The program presented there included Studley Foster, comedy juggler; Johnny Jessie, one finger stand; Alfonso, ponies; James Holm, educated collie dog; Buck Leahy, clown; Jean Campa, chimps; Al Campa, comedy cyclist; Fieda the elephant and Cole trained ponies.

Following the close of the summer run, he sold the equipment not needed for the indoor tour.

In 1966 Cole was called back to the tented circus world by Frank McClosky to manage the King Bros. Circus, replacing Bob Snowden. McClosky had first contacted Cole in 1962 to manage the show, but Cole declined the offer. Cole continued as manager of the King show in 1967 and 1968, when he resigned and was succeeded by Bob Couls.

In the early 1970s the title was again changed to Cole All-Star TV Circus. An article on the Cole school show by William S. Galloway appeared in the January-February 1976 *White Tops*, titled "Jimmie Cole's indoor circus in 1975 toured same route as it has for 37 years."

The article related Cole's founding his indoor show in 1938 following the closing of the Hagenbeck-Wallace show. Acts appearing in the 1975 performance were Reggie and Lorain Robertson, unicycle and rola-bola; Marcelli, juggling act; Wally Eastwood, trampoline; Phil Chandler, magic and Linda Chandler, single trapeze. The tour opened in Williamsport, Pennsylvania on January 13 and business had been very good for the full season.

Cole moved to Deland, Florida in the 1970s where he remained until 1981 when he returned to Penn Yan, New York. He later moved to Sarasota, Florida where he now resides.

In 1988 he sold the Cole All-Star TV Circus to Billy Martin. Under Martin the show has continued to play the same school route it has for fifty years.

James M. Cole is enjoying his retirement in Sarasota. Two days before his 85th birthday on January 9, 1991 he had a pin placed in his hip following a December fall. Cole is now recovering at home. Known as a soft spoken true gentleman he is now referred to respectively as "Mr. Jimmie" by his many friends in the circus world.

Al Conover, Paul Horsman, Jim Dunwoody, Dan Draper, the Circus World Museum, Joe Bradbury and Jimmie Cole helped with research on this article.

CIRCUS REPORT

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1889

A"Canine-Paradox" playing in the Etta Opera House at Council Grove could hardly be called a circus and is mentioned here as sort of a fan-fare for the appearance on the Kansas scene of Prof. Charles Norris who would one day receive a lesson in circus management from Allen Sells and his adopted son, Willie. In 1889, however, Norris was presenting "the greatest dog show on earth."

Norris played Council Grove Friday and Saturday, March 8 and 9. The Council Grove *Guard* ran an excellent ad profusely illustrated with engravings by "Martin of Topeka."

The Canine-Paradox, according to the ad, was,

"Positively the Largest Company and Grandest Display of INTELLIGENT DOGS Ever Presented Upon the Stage."

It was,

"A Refined, Amusing, Interesting and Instructive Entertainment

"A REGULAR DOG KINGDOM, Consisting of Preaching Dogs, Praying Dogs, Musical Dogs, Leaping Dogs, Singing Dogs, Acrobat Dogs, Cute Dogs, Pretty Dogs, Homely Dogs, Black Dogs, White Dogs, Clown Dogs, and in fact all kinds of Dogs. Dogs act as Judges, Lawyers, Criminals, Witnesses and Executioner, and Shoot the Convicted Criminal. In fact they are the Greatest Performing Dogs in the World, accomplishing such feats as Walking Tight Rope Suspended in Mid-Air, Standing on their Heads, Turning Somersaults and all such feats."

"Prices.

10, 20 and 30 cts."

The *Guard* made no mention of the quality of the performance, nor the attendance.

W. L. Cole, Proprietor of the Great International Allied Ten Cent Shows, opened the season of 1889 on Thursday evening, May 2, on the corner of Fourth and Quincy Streets in Topeka. Cole is a mystery man in Topeka circus history. Nothing is known of him except that his name appeared in newspaper advertisements.

"COMING IN ALL ITS SPLENDOR!"

The show was billed for evening performances "One Week Only," with a "Saturday Matinee For Children. Five Cents."

A general view of what to expect was given under the heading,

THE ONLY TRIPLE-HORNED UNICORN

Chapter 4 Part Two

The Gates of Wonderland Thrown Wide Apart

By Orin Copple King

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"25 FIRST-CLASS ARTISTS! 25, Of all nationalities. Gymnasts, acrobats, trapezeists, aerial artists, bicyclists, skat-

This Prof. Norris ad appeared in the Council Grove *Guard* of March 8, 1889. Kansas State Historical Society.

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"The Mancayos!

In their Thrilling Ladder Act, entitled 'the Ladder of Life.' This alone is worth the price of admission.

"Senator Murphy!

The Historic Clown and Character Impersonator, Witty Sayings, Songs, Imitations, and his Celebrated Trick Mules.

"De Castro Bros.

The Champion of the Arena and Double Horizontal Bar Performers, whose feats of strength and agility in their specialities astonish all. These brothers challenge the world. None

barred.

"Miss Lulu Louise Lananda!

The Three-Headed Songstress, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Don't fail to see this great freak of nature."

J. M. Barry, a man of integrity, was named as manager. Barry was listed in the Topeka city directory as "Showman." He resided in Topeka for several years before moving to the village of Carbondale, 12 miles south of Topeka. An intensive investigation of the life of Barry has not uncovered one instance of sharp practices, nor one word of slander. He was a man loved by his contemporaries. His employees called him "Dad."

After the one time ad in the *Kansas Democrat* nothing more was reported. Where the Great International appeared following Topeka is unknown.

"Harry Schmidling, advance agent for the Oklahoma Wild West Show," according to the *Topeka State Journal* of April 29, "is in Topeka today making arrangements for the appearance of this show. Harry is an old Emporia boy and has many old acquaintances in Topeka."

It is not often that the birth of a springtime dream receives extensive reportage, but the *Kansas Democrat*, Topeka, May 4, ran a long and interesting account of the creation of the Oklahoma Historical Wild West Exhibition.

Schmidling scored big when he persuaded the *Democrat* to run the following story, most of which was taken from the *Wichita Eagle*:

"For some time past there has been in formation here in Wichita one of the largest and what promises to be one of the most attractive Wild West exhibitions in

the world. The plans have been quietly laid, and so comparatively little has been said until the present. This entertainment which is to be called the Oklahoma Historical Wild West Exhibition is backed by capitalists, and there is no doubt more money invested in it than in any similar exhibition on the road.

"Yesterday an *Eagle* representative, in company with Mr. Joseph Rich, as financial manager of the company, went up to the Burton Car works to see the train of cars being built there for the transportation of the exhibition.

"There are already completed or in a state of construction six cars. The rolling stock is all new and presents a most attractive appearance. Two of the cars are flats for carrying the stages, tents, band-wagons, electric light apparatus and other heavy articles. Each one is forty-four feet long, ten feet wide, equipped with Westinghouse air-brakes, painted and lettered in a rich and attractive manner.

"Mr. Chamberlain, manager of the car works, next called attention to two very fine improved feeding and watering stock cars for carrying the horses. Both are of extra length, made so in order to carry the large amount of stock which is required by the exhibition. They have a herd of thirty spotted ponies, herd of Texas steers, twelve mountain burros. Then besides these are the trick horses, the bronchos and the bucking horses, making in all over 100 head of stock. These cars, too, are painted in a most attractive manner and beautifully lettered.

"But the cars of which Mr. Chamberlain is especially proud are the two sleeping cars. Both of these, as is the case with the others, are of extra length. One which will be occupied by the performers and the officers of the company is divided into three separate apartments. In the center are the bunks in two rows one above the other, wherein will sleep the male performers. In the rear in a separate apartment are the sleeping apartments for the ladies. In the front of the car is the office fitted out with desks, safe and fine office furniture. The interior furnishing is neat, substantial and all new. The entire car can be ventilated by simply moving a lever over head. The sides of the cars will be painted in an attractive manner with illustrations showing scenes and incidents in the history of Oklahoma.

"Beneath the body of the cars are chests for the storing of provisions, arms, ammunition, glass balls and other small articles which are to be carried while in transit.

"The other car will be given up to the buffalos and Indians, and upon the sides

is 'Buffalos and Indians from Oklahoma.'

"Fifteen buffalos have been secured and will appear at each exhibition. They are magnificent specimens of this rapidly disappearing denizen of the plain.

"The bunks for the Indians have been built in the front part of the car, and while the interior may not be so elaborate and costly as the other car, yet it will be comfortable. The collector for the company has already secured his permit from the government for the Indians, and they will

electric light companies of the cities it will visit for the giving of exhibitions.

"What is to be the character of the entertainment offered is naturally the question asked. In this the management of the company have made a special effort to secure something decidedly novel, interesting and at the same time instructive. While they may not entirely depart from the time honored of wild west entertainments, yet it will as the name indicates partake of the nature of historical exhibition of the leading events of the early life of that much talked of and written about Oklahoma. The boomers on the road to the coveted land under the leadership of Payne and other celebrities, their capture by the troops, imprisonment of Payne, and other scenes. Then besides, will be shown pictures of the west, such as herding of cattle, branding, stealing of horses, capture of the thief, the Indian bands and their depredations, and numerous other pictures and incidents of daily occurrence upon the plains, but always of interest elsewhere. The noted massacre of Pat Hennessy, the old freighter, in the Big Flats, will be presented.

"The riding and shooting will be specialties which will be equalled in no other exhibition for the very best of talent has been secured. At one time in the entertainment a herd of wild ponies, wild buffalos and wild steers, each with a rider upon their back, will be let loose in front of the amphitheater, bucking, kicking and prancing.

"The band of Indians, which will comprise representatives from the Sioux and Comanche, will give an exhibition of their riding and shooting. A bevy of Spanish beauties mounted upon beautiful white horses will be another feature of great merit. They will give exhibitions in graceful riding the equal which was never before produced in any exhibition.

"There will be the cowboys with their bucking horses, their long horned steers, their broncos. They will ride, shoot and give most realistic pictures of the wild west.

"Among some of the people already secured by this exhibition are Captain A. H. Bogardus and sons, S. F. Cody jr., and wife, 'Yellowstone Vic,' 'Texas Charley,' Capt. Horne and wife.

"Capt. Bogardus is already so well known in this country that nothing need be said of him. It is his intention at the opening exhibition to break any of his former records. His sons are like their father, great shots. Young Pete in particular has been praised and petted where ever he



arrive here in a short time to commence the season. There will be in all fifty, comprising bucks, squaws and papooses.

"These last two described cars are fitted with Miller platforms and Westinghouse air-brakes. The whole train can thus be attached to a passenger train if necessary. The agreement made with the railroad companies is for the transportation of this train by a special engine, and to travel at the same rate of speed as passenger trains. The cars are certainly beauties and will display wherever they go the name of the 'Historical Wild West, with Headquarters at Wichita, Kan.,' and be a credit to their manufacturers, the Burton Car works, Wichita, Kan. This company will thus be the only wild west show which to-day is traveling by its own special train.

"Besides these cars there is the beautiful advance car which is expected to arrive here in a few days from the east. It is fitted up in the same fine, attractive manner that always distinguishes the advance herald of a wealthy travelling exhibition of this kind.

"The company will carry its own engine and dynamo for the manufacture of its own electric lights. It will thus be in no wise dependent or at the mercy of the

has been seen. When he shot in England before Queen Victoria she presented him with a beautiful medal and kissed him when she pinned it upon his bosom. This medal the little fellow wears with no small degree of pride. In a recent letter from the captain he says that he and his sons are all training and practising shooting while riding horseback. He will arrive in the city in a short time, and in company with other members of the company will go down into the Oklahoma country to take up claims.

"Sam F. Cody, jr., and his wife are considered the crack pistol shots of the world. Their feats will be shooting glass balls from each other's head, mouth and hand. People who have seen them say that their performance is something truly wonderful and entirely different from anything ever presented.

"Yellowstone Vic," a fine looking, manly specimen of humanity, will ride anything from a bucking horse to a buffalo or Texas steer. He agrees to ride at every exhibition a buffalo, a feat seldom or never attempted.

"Texas Charley," the great lasso thrower will give an exhibition of his skill that will be worth seeing.

"Captain Harry Horne will be remembered as one of the best lecturers that ever attempted to explain the features and characteristics of a wild west exhibition.

"Yesterday the management secured another great feature in Prof. Langford, the aeronaut, who goes up in a balloon to the height of one mile and leaps from it to the ground by parachute. This wonderful feat has attracted the attention of the world; many have tried and most of them have failed. One of Prof. Langford's ascensions was witnessed by 100,000 persons and the press commenting upon it says, 'The sight was thrillingly beautiful. Onward and upward almost in a straight line did the car and its occupant go until the balloon appeared no bigger than a football. Spectators were enthralled at the sight, and when an object apparently no bigger than a doll's street parasol was seen to fall from the balloon into space, the people held their breath in suspense.'

"As a hawk striking its prey the professor came on; faster and faster it appeared as the earth was neared, until, like a shot the aeronaut struck the water."

"The music is to be furnished by the board of trade band of the city, or rather by members picked by Prof. Woods, who is the musical director. The band will be carried in a magnificent new band wagon, now being built at a cost of \$5,000. It will

be drawn by six white mules, richly caparisoned, and will form an interesting feature of the street parade.

"In this parade will also be drawn two old stages that have seen years of active service upon the plains, carrying Uncle Sam's mails and its freight of humanity. They have both been through border fights and still bear unmistakable evidence of the conflicts. There will, too, appear the Indians and the cowboys in their own trappings and outfits, the Spanish beauties, the buffaloes, the steers and the horses. The whole making a striking street cavalcade.

The company as before stated is



backed by capital and will be run on strictly business principals. Several of Wichita's moneyed men are interested in the scheme and one-third at least of the attaches of the exhibition are Wichita people; it is in fact a western concern backed by western capital and portraying and representing truthfully wild western life.

"Mr. Davis, the skillful advance agent, has already made arrangements for an eastern tour and says that wherever he has been the people are watching for the advent of the exhibition with no little interest.

"It will open here [Wichita] at the fair grounds on the 4th of May and give an exhibition that day and the one following. It is expected that the exhibition here will draw large crowds. Excursion tickets will be sold on all roads leading into the city, and the hotels are preparing for the accommodation of the guests. The tents will soon be put up for the accommodation of the employees, and even now by each train they are coming here for the opening. The bill poster will soon be out with the lithographs, the big posters and the small bills will be sent forth declaring the opening of the Oklahoma Historical Wild West exhibition.

"From here they go to Emporia, Topeka, St. Joseph, Kansas City; then across Missouri, Iowa and Illinois for a two-weeks' stand at Chicago, thence to Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Buffalo and New York city."

The Emporia *Democrat* of May 8 reporting on the exhibitions of May 6, described the parade: "The principal features of the parade were the Indian men and women riding the proverbial pony, and two of the modern stage coaches occupying prominent positions. Oklahoma Hill, also Captain Bogardus and his sons were to be seen. A brass band occupied the leading wagon and discoursed music as the procession moved up and down Commercial street. The company left at night for Topeka where they showed Tuesday; from there they go to Kansas City where they are billed for one week. The wild and woolly west was forcibly displayed by the different parts of the parade."

The Emporia paper failed to report on the size of the audience or the quality of the exhibitions.

At Topeka the *Kansas Democrat*, commenting on the exhibitions of May 7 and 8, thought, "The Oklahoma Historical Wild West show at the fair grounds is one of the best ever given in this city."

The return of a show to quarters in mid-summer for the purpose of "reorganizing" is almost certain to indicate a failed season. On July 31, the Oklahoma Historical Wild West arrived in Wichita for "the purpose of reorganizing and going back upon the road."

The Wichita *Daily Eagle*, of August 1 reported the arrival: "RETURN OF OKLAHOMA WILD WEST.

"Last evening the train carrying Oklahoma Harry Hill's wild west show arrived in the city over the Missouri Pacific road after a 600 mile jump from Springfield, Ill. The company was larger and more complete than when it left this city the 5th day of May last. All were in good spirits and cheered lustily as the train came to a halt near the passenger depot. The top of the box cars were ornamented with twenty-five Indians in full red blanket dress parade, while the sides of the cars were filled up with Mexicans, cowboys and roustabouts. The stages and other show paraphernalia ornamented the flat cars and the scene was a familiar and happy one.

"Hundreds of people had been drawn to the depot by the word that the Wichita show was to arrive and they cheered heartily as the train moved in. As soon as the familiar face and form of Harry Hill

appeared in the door of the sleeper he was given an ovation, and in a second at most was surrounded by old friends, who acted as if they never expected to let him go home to get a much needed rest.

The Indians and other people with the show were taken to restaurants and fed and will today go into camp at the fair grounds, and on Saturday the show will give its first entertainment. During the eastern trip it has been enlarged and strengthened until the press and public everywhere unite in praising the entertainment. The riding is better and so is the roping and shooting. Captain Bogardus met many of his old friends and received a hearty welcome from all. He says that he is glad to get to Wichita, as this busy little city seems almost like home to him.

"During the trip east Harry Hill has played Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio. The show's last stand was made at Springfield, Ill., and the big jump from there to this city was for the purpose of reorganizing and going back upon the road. The show will play a large number of fairs and may split up into two parts. During the first five weeks out it rained continuously and the show had hard luck, but the last few weeks have been very successful ones. It met with twenty-one standard shows on the road; showing conclusively that this has been a bad show season. No doubt the boys will be greeted with the banner crowd of the season at this, their old home."

On a different page the *Eagle* carried a two-column ad extolling the exhibitions beginning August 3rd.

A reporter for the *Eagle* visited the Oklahoma camp on Friday and reported on the preparations for the Saturday exhibition.

The camp is much larger than it was prior to the departure of the show for the east last spring. Everything was neat, cleanly and picturesque. The tents were laid out on streets and there a uniform distance apart, reminding one of a soldiers camp.

The dining tent is almost new and very large. The tables were bright and in thorough apple pie order. The veteran Captain Harry Horn had charge of this department, and to say that he attends to his work right would be putting it mildly. In his department he simply has things in perfect shape. Another feature is the Indian village, with the noble red men of

the forest laying lazily about in their tepees or playing cards beside them.

"After a thorough survey of the camp California Frank, a rider and roper, and Mexican Rafael, the champion roper of the world, saddled up their horses and started out to lasso and ride a wild steer that had been purchased by the company yesterday morning. As the animal came into sight it was seen that he was a large, fine looking yellow fellow, with a very devil in his eyes. Harry Hill warned everybody to get to a safe place, and the fun began. The scene was as near like a genuine bull fight as it possibly could be. The

deep into the front shoulder of Rafael's horse badly crippling the poor horse.

"Rafael almost cried over the injury to his pet and when last seen was trying to ease the pain of the wound with salve and bandages. This is said to be the most savage steer in the country and will be rode this afternoon at the performance to be given at the fair grounds.

"Ed Lawson, the 'Wichita Kid,' rode a bucking burro much to the amusement of all present.

"The show will make a grand parade at 11 o'clock this morning and will give their first entertainment this afternoon at 3 o'clock. The general admission will be 50 cents for grown people and 25 cents for children. Harry Hill can well feel proud of the great show he has gotten together. Texas Thomas, the finest roper of Texas, will give a startling exhibition of his skill with the rope this afternoon."

Speaking of the performance of Saturday, the *Eagle* stated that, "Considering the fact that the dates on the lithographs were not correct the show had a good attendance. There were probably a thousand present, and as the exhibition was the best ever witnessed in this city the crowd this afternoon will number away up into the thousands.

"After the grand entry Captain A. H. Bogardus and his three sons did some fancy rifle, revolver and shotgun shooting, and to say that they gave satisfaction would be superfluous. They were cheered to the echo. Bogardus has a reputation second to none as a fine shot, and little Henry, his 13-year son, is a card that is hard to beat.

"The pick-up act of the cowboys was well received by the crowd, but Ed Lawson, the boy, came in for the greatest share of applause. California Frank was also well received.

"The riding of bucking horses was a grand act. Mexican Rafael, California Frank and Wichita Ed, brought down the house by their fine work. The horses were mean, savage brutes, but they rode them just the same. Santa Cruz, the negro clown, rode a bucking burro and raised several hearty laughs. The roping exhibition given by Mexican Thomas and Rafael was the finest ever witnessed in this city and set the people wild.

"Then Oklahoma Hill and Harry, Jr., did some fine, fancy shooting. The boy made a dozen shots and never missed one. Part of his act consisted of shooting small glass balls out of the girl Sadie's

GRAND RETURN TRIP

The Oklahoma Wild West

Has returned on their OWN TRAIN OF CARS and WILL EXHIBIT in this City

Beginning Saturday, August 3d

The show is larger, more interesting and better equipped than ever before. The press and public endorse it all over the country as the best Wild West Show that ever took the road. No museum freaks, but all pure Wild West material.

MORE HORSES, MORE INDIANS

The only Mexicans and the largest crowd of Cowboys ever brought before the Wichita public at one time for show purposes.

Don't Miss the Grand Street Parade at 11 A. M.

Captain A. H. Bogardus and his Three Sons

Will give EXHIBITIONS OF FANCY SHOOTING. Don't fail to see them.

MEXICAN RAFAEL AND MEXICAN THOMAS

Together with a band of Mexican men and Mexican women will give exhibitions of roping and riding. MAJOR, THE SPANISH QUEEN, and ROPEFALO BESSIE, the only lady that ever attempted to ride a buffalo, will appear daily.

OKLAHOMA HARRY HILL

And his son, Harry, Jr., will give a fine exhibition of fancy Rifle and Revolver Shooting.

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH.

An immense aggregation of people, all first class people in their line of business.

DON'T FORGET THE DAY AND DATE.

This ad appeared in the Wichita Daily *Eagle* on August 1, 1889. Kansas State Historical Society.

steer showed fight at once. Rafael cast his rope and caught by one horn, but the steer jumped the fence and got away. He was driven back and once more Rafael caught him by the horns. Seeing that he could not hold him that way the Mexican by a dexterous move rode up along side the raging brute and catching him by the tail threw him clear over on his back by urging his horse to a great rate of speed. Then he was tied down and Santa Cruz, a negro rider, rode him. While California Frank and Rafael were taking the ropes off the beast he made a lunge and drove one of his long, sharp horns seven inches

Wichita

hands and mouth, a dangerous act but well executed. Then Harry Hill himself did some fancy revolver shooting, and followed up with rifle shooting. Very few people knew that Harry was a fine shot and as he shot bullet after bullet through little glass balls as they swung back and forth in the air the people were amazed and gave vent to their satisfaction by prolonged cheers and applause. Harry Hill has proven himself to be one of the best shots in the country today.

The attack on the trapper's cabin, the hanging of the horse thief, the pony express and the robbing of the overland stage coach were all splendid acts and were well received. This afternoon the program will be varied some what and several flat races will be introduced. The Indians will also hold religious services and show how they worship when at home. The entertainment has been pronounced first-class by all that witnessed it and will continue their engagement until after tomorrow."

By August 7 it was all over for the Oklahoma Historical Wild West. The performance scheduled for Wednesday was postponed and was not re-scheduled.

Captain Bogardus and his sons gave a benefit performance at Crawford's Grand theatre on August 10, and disappeared from the news.

The final word was published on August 10 in the *Eagle*, relating the following: "The Oklahoma Wild West Indians left last night for their home in the Pottawatomie agency, near Mayetta, Kan. Harry Hill took them to the Rock Island depot and the 'good bye' passed around when they took the train, first going in the common coach. Hill concluded the noble red man should have a chair car and it only took a few minutes to get them back in the chair cars, but it was the other passengers who had to endure the punishment. There was no information received about a fight with the whites."

L. J. Duchack, "Sole Proprietor," brought his New London Rail Road Show to Leavenworth in 1889, for two shows daily, May 15 and 16. The *Evening Standard* on May 14, ran a short handout stating that, "The Duchack circus to exhibit at Delaware and Broadway to-morrow and Thursday afternoon and evening sports twenty leapers, twenty tumblers, five

bareback riders, ten gymnasts, ten acrobats and three clowns. The show will arrive to-morrow morning over the ferry."

The New London came to East Leavenworth, Missouri, on the Burlington and was transferred to the ferry.

A small ad, one column, 33 lines, appeared in the *Standard* for five insertions.

"DUCHACK'S
New London R. R.
SHOW!"

In all its grand entirety. The largest one ring show in this country. Will exhibit corner Delaware & Broadway

Afternoon and evening for
TWO DAYS!

—only—

May 15 and 16
Tickets 10 and 20 cents.
Grand street parade
each day at 10 a.m.
See programs and
descriptive bills for
particulars."

Following opening night the *Standard* reported a highly successful exhibition.

The doors of Duchack's circus were closed at 8 o'clock last night. The canvas was packed so that to let more in would have been impossible. The entertainment was good. It was repeated this afternoon and the last performance will be given this evening."

After the last performance the show packed up in the rain and moved to Atchison.

The Atchison *Daily Clipper* carried Duchack's ad for ten days. The ad was about one third deeper than that used in Leavenworth.

"L. J. DUCHACK'S
New London

Railroad Shows will exhibit at
ATCHISON, May 17 & 18,
Afternoon and Evening
Grand Free Street Parade at 10 a. m. each
day.

FREE WIRE ASCENSION
Each afternoon and evening.
Beautiful riders and Horses.

Three Great Clowns.

Lady Gymnasts and Aerial Artists.

Roman Games.

Athletes.

Artists.

Jugglers.

And many Amusing and
Wonderful Features.

Don't Fail to See It!

One Price admits to all.

Remember, only
10 and 20 Cents.

Come early to avoid the rush for seats. Lot located at Eighth and Commercial streets. See newspapers and bills for full details.

L. J. DUCHACK,
Sole Proprietor."

The Atchison *Daily Globe* of May 18 reported that, "The London circus arrived yesterday, but did not pitch its tents owing to the heavy rain. It paraded this morning, however, and will give a performance at the corner of Eighth and Commercial."

The *Champion* was of the opinion that, "Last night [May 17] was one of the rainiest, darkest, and most disagreeable of the season."

The *Globe* declared that, "A clown can't be funny when standing in mud knee deep. The circus performance of Saturday night demonstrated this fact."

All that the *Champion* had to say May 19, was, "It hailed a little last evening."

Sam McFlinn's Ten Cent Circus came to Atchison on May 19 and pitched its tents on the same lot used a few hours earlier by Duchack at Eighth and Commercial Streets.

The *Daily Globe* on May 21 reported a most unusual happening on any circus lot.

"So many people attended Sam McFlinn's ten cent circus last night that the doors were finally closed, as standing room could not be had. Hundreds of people waited outside until the concert, and then attended that."

The show, according to the *Globe*, moved on to Hiawatha.

One more character in the saga of Willie Sells was on the Kansas stage.

Lemen Brothers' Monster Show exhibited in Topeka on June 10 and 11. Reports were scant and all that we know of the show is a paragraph in the *Kansas Democrat*. "Lemen Bros. show arrived in town to-day [June 10] and it is the largest 10 and 20 cent exhibition on earth. They remain two days only, on Quincy, between Fourth and Fifth streets."

No advertising appeared in the Topeka papers, but the *Democrat* did run a handout that provided no details concerning either the equipment or the performance.

For the exhibitions of June 24 and 25, at Arkansas City, the show ran a clean two-column ad decorated with an interesting engraving of "Phenomenal Feats of Ceiling Walking." Among the "Countless New and startling Sensations! To be seen with no other exhibition.

Performing Ponies,
Performing Goats,
Performing Dogs.
Performing Horses."

The show was "A Sunburst of Dazzling



LEMEN BRO'S MONSTER SHOW!

A COLLOSSAL AND STUPENDOUS EXHIBITION!
Largest Popular Priced Amusement Enterprise on earth.

50 MERITORIOUS PERFORMERS. 50



PHENOMENAL FEATS OF CEILING WALKING.

20 LADY ARTISTS!

The Most Famous Equestrians!
The Most Daring Gymnasts!
The Most Graceful Athletes!
The Most Skillful Jugglers!
The Most Intrepid Acrobats!
The Most Comical Clowns!
Two Performances Afternoon and Evening.

Two Days Only.

MONDAY & TUESDAY

This ad appeared in the Arkansas City *Canal City Dispatch* on June 20, 1889. Kansas State Historical Society.

and Amazing Features. A Remarkable Show! Full of Remarkable Attractions. An Enormous Gathering of Earth's Best Artists."

In addition to the ad, the Arkansas City *Fair Play* ran a smattering of one liners.

"Lemen Bros. circus is highly spoken of by the press.

"Lemen Bros. circus is no side show, but a great big first-class show for a special price.

"Lemen Bros. Monday and Tuesday, afternoon and evening."

The *Weekly Republican Traveler* carried no ad but there were a few scattered references to the show:

"Lemen Bros.' big 10 and 20 cent show, Monday and Tuesday, June 24th and 25th. Grounds at Santa Fe depot."

"There are five funny clowns with Lemen Bros. show."

After the show had come and gone the *Traveler* reported that, "Dug Ownes [sic], one of the performers at the circus, got a fall from the rings last night and sprained his shoulder very badly."

The advance agent for the "monster show" was working five days ahead.

Lemen Brothers played a return engagement in Topeka on July 5 and 6 under an augmented title--Lemen Bros. Combined New York and New Orleans Shows. The New York-New Orleans designation had been used for years by W. W. Cole. In later years Lemen Brothers claimed that they were "Successors to W. W. Cole."

The lot was Haymarket Square at Fourth and Jackson Streets. No ads were used other than short sentences in the Topeka *State Journal* giving only the place and date.

"The advertising car of Sells Bro's. great show arrived in town yesterday [July 10], and immediately went to work spreading their mammoth and attractive posters upon the bill boards around the public square," reported the Dodge City *Times* on July 11. In the same column the *Times* announced that "Sells Bro's. greatest show on earth will pitch their tents in this city on Monday, Aug. 5th."

On the same page as the above, appeared an ad two-columns wide and the length of the page. It was not just Sells Brothers big show that was coming to Dodge City in 1889, but, as the ad indicated,

"SELLS BRO'S

Enormous United Shows
--in mighty union with --

S. H. Barrett's Great World's Fair!"

It was,

"A Grand Olympian Festival
Of Intellectual
and Refined Amusements,
Rich and Rare as the
Feasts of the Fabled Gods."

In addition to being "Bigger and Better than All Other Shows Combined," it was the "GREATEST CORPS OF PERFORMERS EVER ASSEMBLED;" it was "the most important union of Great Railroad Shows The World Has Ever Known;" it had "THE FINEST AND MOST ACCOMPLISHED NEW EQUESTRIAN FEATURES that have ever thrilled an audience." The Gymnastic Exploits were "Unrivaled & Daring." The "Jocund and Jolly Clowns" were "the best in the profession." The menagerie was "the LARGEST AND BEST ever shown under canvas." In addition, Sells & Barrett had "The Best and most Impressive FREE

STREET PARADE that ever delighted the People."

On the elevated stage were "Wrestlers, Boxers and Gladiatorial Combatants, in friendly rivalry." The hippodrome was enlivened with "Chariot Races, Roman Standing Races, Flat Races and Jockey Races, By Expert and Daring Lady and Gentlemen Jockeys and Charioteers."

In all the bombast no performers were mentioned by name. Only General Phil Sheridan, recently dead, was named, one of the advertised features being Little Phil's "Gallant, Daring and Chivalrous Ride" which was "Thrillingly and vividly exemplified each day and evening." How Sheridan's ride from Winchester was "exemplified" was never reported in the Kansas press.

Advertising car No. 2 arrived July 24 and Dodge City, according to the *Times*, "was again flooded with advertising matter. The great circus promises to draw a large number of people on Aug. 5th. It is a good show and none who attend will go away dissatisfied."

Both the Sells title and S. H. Barrett were well known in Kansas. To those who knew that the Sells brothers were also the founders and owners of the Barrett show, the history of the "consolidation" was an amusing phantasy. A handout, extensively used, explained the union as follows: "Both these shows were perfectly equipped and organized to travel separately, as they have done for many past seasons, but when Sells Brothers learned that the Barrett show contemplated making a tour of the Pacific coast this season, negotiations were opened which resulted in the consolidation of both shows in one, and the tour will be made in union."—Wichita *Daily Eagle*, August 3.

Circus titles were frequently expanded by "consolidations," "unions," "alliances," etc., which invariably "doubled" the size of the show, but evidence of the merger generally went unnoticed. The Sells-Barrett consolidation did provide proof of a merger since equipment, particularly cages, from both shows could be identified by differences in design and color.

The Wichita handout concluded with, "While this will increase the daily expense nearly double, the price of admission will not be increased."

The Dodge City *Times* of August 8 reported that, "A large audience was present both in the afternoon and evening, and all went away well pleased."

It was a great day for Dodge City hotels. According to the *Times*, "All the hotels were crowded with guests on last Monday, and the number registered at the leading hotels reached up among the hundreds."

It was not easy for Sims & Shinn, grocers, to go away from the circus well

pleased, but they did receive satisfaction, as reported by the *Times* of August 8:

"Sims & Shinn were promised two circus tickets for allowing bills to be posted in their store. The circus man attempted to beat them out of the tickets, which on account of the smallness of the matter, caused the firm to attach one of the circus wagons for the debt of one dollar. The circus immediately settled."

In 1889 Sells-Barrett played at least 16 dates in Kansas: August 5, Dodge City; August 6, Great Bend; August 7, McPherson; August 8, Florence; August 9, Arkansas City; August 10, Guthrie, Oklahoma; August 12, Wellington, Kansas; August 13, Wichita; August 14, Hutchinson; August 15, Newton; August 16, Osage City; August 17, Topeka; August 19, Kansas City, Missouri; August 20, Lawrence, Kansas; August 21, Abilene; August 22, Clay Center; August 23, Concordia; August 24, Washington.

The Great Bend *Weekly Tribune* of August 9 reported the exhibitions of August 6 in a style common to small town papers, a style that illustrates the excitement and the importance of Circus Day in small town Kansas a hundred years ago. The *Weekly Tribune* quoted extensively the *Daily Tribune* which accounts for the mixture of "yesterdays" and "yesterdays."

"The parade was very fine and was witnessed by clouds [sic] of people all along the line.

"C. F. Benford was up from St. John to see the elephant.

"Carney was in and borrowed a child to take to the show.

"J. R. Brown came clown down Larned to take the children to the show.

"Ira Brouyher is on the hunt for a child to take to the show, wants one about 18 years old.

"Will Campbell and Larry Byrnes came down from Larned last night to take in the circus.

"The city was free yesterday from the tramps, vagabonds and fakirs that usually flood the town with a big show. Sells Bros., deserve credit for freeing their show of this class of abominations.

"There was enough money squandered yesterday to have endowed a college, built a canning factory, or insured most of the next year's crops against the elements.

"Watermelons 25 cents, and peaches a \$1 a box in town today.

"They gathered from the four corners of the earth to see the elephant go round and round.

"A couple of the circus employees had a little scrap this morning, and the claret flowed in profusion.

"Promptly at 1 o'clock the whole population moved into the big tent, and peace reigned over the city.

"Mr. Sells, proprietor of the big show, was quite sick today with quinsy. Dr. White attended him and gave him relief.

"The people did not come to town today to trade, and have done but little of it. They came for fun and they had wagon loads of it."

"The 1st Building Association meeting for this evening will be adjourned until next Tuesday evening, owing to the unsettled condition of things in town today.

"The natives commenced pouring in town by 8 o'clock this morning, and by 10 the city was a living, surging mass, the sidewalks and streets blockaded, and everybody filled with bright anticipation, ice cream and other bric-a-brac.

"The merchants generally had a large trade yesterday, but a number of refreshment stands were not self-supporting.

"Mrs. Wallace was hurt quite seriously in the circus, by missing her footing and falling across a seat. It will be some time before she fully recovers.

"The ladies of the M. E. and Congregational churches worked hard yesterday and raised very snug sums for their churches. They deserve much praise for their untiring efforts in this direction.

"Out of the vast number of people suddenly brought together yesterday, no fighting or drunkenness occurred. It was as orderly and peaceable throughout town as in a church. Prohibition does prohibit.

"Sells Bros. big show entertained about 7,000 people yesterday. Among the interesting features were the jockey races, man and horse, elephant race, camel race, etc. The Gilfort Bros., as Roman Gladiators, representing in tableaux ancient and modern statuary. The clown elephant was very fine. The bicycling also. The Japanese contortionists were fine. In fact, the show was a grand success and people went away well pleased."

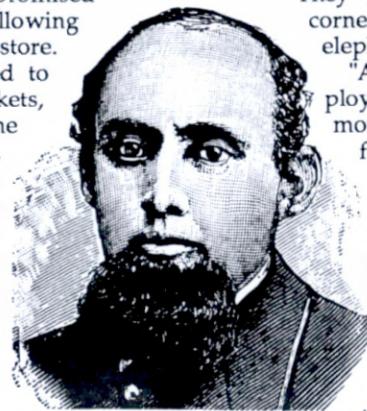
The best comment was, "A show brings the people out equal to a hanging in Arkansas."

The fakirs, frauds and gamblers, so notably missing at Great Bend, appeared in force at McPherson for the exhibitions of August 7. The editor of the *McPherson Daily Republican* was outraged and on August 8, ran the following editorial: "The Circus and The Gamblers.

"The circus was granted license on their own printed blank forms which they took with them. They paid seventy-five dollars. City Attorney Travis says that it included the circus proper, the side shows, lemonade and peanut stands and water privileges and nothing more.

"But there were in actual operation swindles of various kinds. These were not concealed but open and above board. A man in a buggy on the most frequented part of the grounds carried on the soap game and Sells close by was the ball and pin. Two thimblerig tables were within a few feet of these. This is now known as the shell game, halves of English walnut shells having been substituted for the old fashioned thimbles or cups.

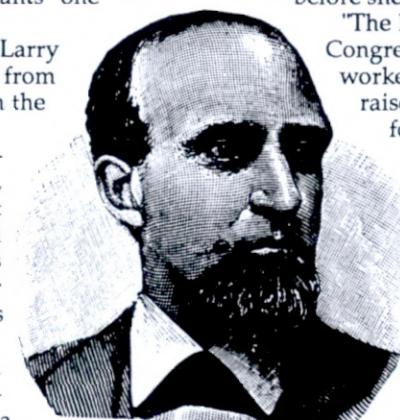
"No attempt was made to interfere with this scandalous state of affairs. The city attorney and the police looked on and amused themselves. We have no sympathy with the fools who got bit. They were there to get something for nothing and paid for their folly. It is not in their interest that we are writing. But in the name of common decency and common honesty, why was such a state of affairs allowed. No such disgrace has happened to the city since the day that it was incorporated. Every decent man in town hangs his head in shame. Had this matter broken out suddenly and been at once suppressed, it would have been a small affair. But these games were going on at two o'clock and the reports that came to this office seemed so exaggerated that the editor made a personal investigation for himself and at half past seven he found the games going on as had been reported



Ephraim Sells



Peter



Lewis Sells

to him, and he saw several officers on the ground at the time.

"Mr. Creek, the city marshal, has stated that his instructions were to let them alone.

The soap man went to the city attorney yesterday and asked permission to come up on the street. Travis told him that he could not come up on the street without a special license and advised him to see the mayor. Mr. Reynolds happening to be there was asked to go with the fakir to see the mayor. The fakir shortly afterward returned saying that it was all right, arrangements had been made with the mayor, at the same time he produced a batch of complimentary tickets for the council. The soap game was run near the Union hotel till the parade.

"We advocated the nomination and election of a Republican administration that somebody might be held responsible. The Republican administration of the city of McPherson is responsible and cannot avoid the blame."

The McPherson *Democrat* on August 9 agreed with the *Republican*, but went a step further in placing the blame:

"Fakirs--The female city government earned the contempt of the citizens of McPherson last Wednesday, by permitting the worst crowd of fakirs to rob the people that have ever struck this town. The 'soap racket,' the 'shell game,' the 'ball and pin' contrivance, all ran 'wide open' and with full permission from the mayor, city marshal and city attorney. They were all gambling devices pure and simple, and were known to be such. The 'soap racket' was worked on Main street within easy talking distance of the office of the city attorney, and with the knowledge and consent of the mayor and city marshal. The gamblers fleeced their victims out of hundreds of dollars. We do not blame the gamblers for doing this, nor do we pity the poor 'suckers' who 'bit' at games that were always losers to the biters. The blame for the whole business rests with our petticoat government. Every gambling device in McPherson could have been closed up and run out in five minutes had the mayor, city marshal and city attorney done their duty and enforced the laws as they should have done, and as the public expected them to do. No more female reform administration for us, if Wednesday's work is a sample."

The power behind the reform administration was militant women who

challenged the old guard and won, and were therefore forever unforgiven.

It was a bad day for women's lib.

As for the show, the *Democrat* thought that, "The menagerie was not as large as that carried by other shows that have visited McPherson, but the arena performance was superior to any thing ever seen in this city. The attendance afternoon and evening was about 6,000."

For the amount of money spent on Arkansas City newspaper ads, the Sells-

was filled at both the afternoon and evening performance. The performance was entertaining. Every act was good and some remarkably so. The menagerie was the best ever exhibited in the city. The parade was long and nearly everyone remarked it was splendid. It is estimated that from 10,000 to 15,000 people witnessed it. The show went to Guthrie from here."

In another column the *Traveler* reported that, "One of the interesting features of the parade yesterday was the decorated wagon of C. L. Newton, the grocer, who is determined to push his justly celebrated Bo Hee tea to the front." Newton furnished groceries to the show.

"It is said the circus cleared \$6000 in this city. The receipts were \$9000 and the expenses \$3000." The *Republican Traveler* did not reveal the source of its figures.

One arrest on the show grounds was reported by the *Republican Traveler*:

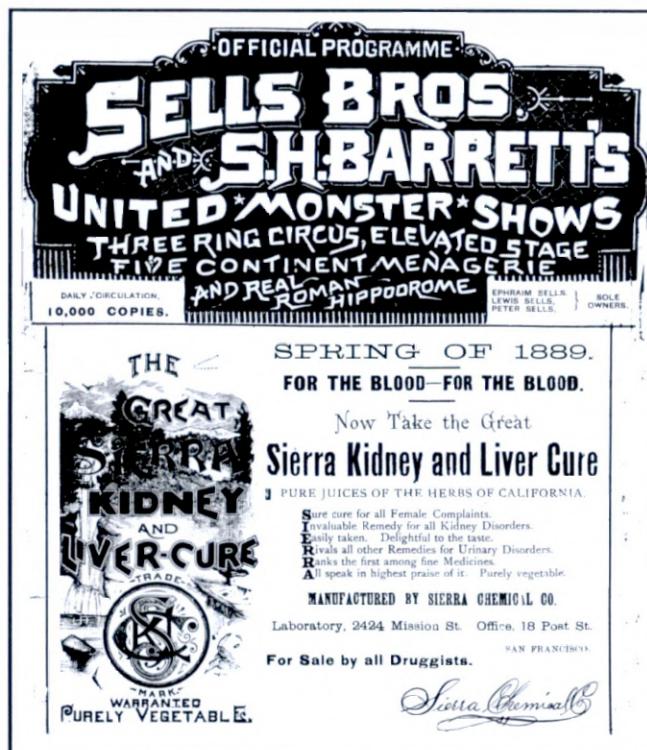
"Stella Caton, a prostitute, was arrested circus night for stealing a dress from another lewd woman called Dora. The dress was taken July 4th and Stella wore it to the circus and got caught. She is in jail awaiting trial which takes place next Thursday."

Usually merchants reaped a harvest from the circus crowds, but there were some who tasted sour grapes, like the man quoted in the *Republican Traveler* on August 22:

"Talking about circuses," said a gentleman yesterday, "business men, without exception are not charitable disposed toward them and aver they are a detriment and not a help to a town." A merchant remarked yesterday: "I would rather have a rainy Saturday than a circus day. Circuses are no good to the merchants and they take a great deal more money out of a town than they bring in. Any merchant will tell you that. When people come to town on circus day, it is with one object in view--seeing the circus. And they are not to be deterred from their purpose. Of course, our city trade amounts to almost nothing on such a day, so we are cut off all around, the day the elephant is in town."

The Wichita *Daily Eagle* on August 14th reported the exhibitions of the day before with some information not usually found in circus reviews:

"The parade was accompanied by three bands and the wagons, horses, cages, and the usual sights in a first class circus pa-



Cover of the eight page program issued by the Sells & Barrett show in 1889. Pfenning Archives.

Barrett press corps harvested an unusually small crop of handouts.

The Arkansas City *Daily Traveler* ran three ads and no handouts.

The *Weekly Republican Traveler* ran three ads and no handouts.

The *Canal City Dispatch* ran two ads and no handouts.

The *Arkansas Valley Democrat* had three ads and one handout.

Fair Play ran four ads and four handouts.

After Circus Day August 9 show news continued scarce.

The *Daily Traveler*, reported on August 10, that:

"The circus has come and gone. It took three trains to bring it here. It was a great affair and there were thousands of people here to witness it. The great tent was pitched near the Santa Fe depot and it

rade were furnished the crowds. The people seemed satisfied that it was all right and they would take some more of it later in the day. As the parade passed the court house a number were alarmed over the situation of the man who had charge of the hyena cage. He was in the cage and two of them commenced to fight. He beat them over the head vigorously, and while running a big bluff for peace in the family, changed his color to a marked degree and seemed to realize that he was in a dangerous locality. He got them apart in a few moments, and there was no more trouble. It was learned that a dog fight near the corner of Main and Douglas caused the animals to be disturbed, resulting in the dangerous situation. Nearly two years ago a man was killed in the same cage under similar circumstances while in California. This fact, no doubt, was readily recalled by the fellow in charge yesterday while he was engaged in some hard work for peace.

An afternoon and evening performance was given; the former witnessed by seventy-three hundred people and the latter by seventy-nine hundred. The menagerie tent was eighty by two hundred and ten feet with the annex show in a tent eighty by one hundred and ninety. The main tent was three hundred and fifty by two hundred and fifty with dressing room sixty-five by one hundred and twenty.

In the menagerie the people seemed to be well pleased, aside from the usual collections were four ostriches, two male and two female over eight feet high. Three cub lions eighteen days old were of the less common while the cage containing a pair of hippopotami seemed to be an attractive feature.

The circus performance opened with an imposing spectacular entree in the two rings, on the elevated stage and hippodrome track introducing all the professional features of the combined shows. The beginning was a very satisfactory one to the people and so indicated by cheers from the immense crowd.

Those most deserving of special mention were: Tight rope dancing by Mr. Park Melrose; English bounding jockey by the equestrian Master Wm. Sells and American bounding jockey by Wm. Showles; the Melrose family, four in number, on the bicycle received liberal applause for their fancy and intricate maneuvers. The bareback riding by Miss Addie Bell and Miss Josie Ashton was pronounced very clever and received with cheers from around the row. One of the striking features was thirty-five horses, reined, ridden and driven by Signor Bhau. This was put down among the very best changes accorded to the program of a circus performance. The hippodrome races were at-

tended with more excitement than is usual. The west end of the ring took in some sand and on two occasions horses fell down, throwing riders, but fortunately no one was hurt. A large per cent of the crowd would have offered no objection had this part of the program under the circumstances been dispensed with. The management, however, were afraid someone would 'kick' and no feature was omitted.



Rider George Kline was featured on this Sells & Barrett lithograph. Pfening Archives.

The performance was three and a half hours long and was quite enough circus for any one, for one day. The show seemed to give complete satisfaction and it was observed that it had been improved greatly since its appearance here two years ago. The crowds were also larger.

People living in Anthony had nothing to worry about when the Wichita performance was all over and out. The *Eagle* reported that, "The Missouri Pacific to Anthony will hold the regular train today, which leaves at 7:05 p.m., until after the show tonight, to accommodate those attending the circus."

The *Clipper*, a most unusual newspaper devoted to "Society, Humor and The Drama," had a few words to say about the ex-

hibitions at Hutchinson on August 14.

The street parade was good containing some fifty odd dens of animals and floats. The show, both afternoon and evening, was well attended by an appreciative audience. The ring performance was a great deal better than the average show. One thing we noticed with this combination, was the absence of all loud and vulgar language that is generally very prominent with the average show. The employees of Sells Bros., are a gentlemanly set of people."

When the announcer tried his concert pitch the crowd made such a noise that all he could say was "there will be a concert after the big show, price twenty-five cents." As he was leaving the tent he was heard to remark that he didn't know he was in Bradford, Pennsylvania."

The *Clipper* acknowledged that, "We are under many obligations to Col. Chas. Seeley, press representative of Sells Bros., mammoth show for favors shown us during the stay of that show in this city."

The Hutchinson *Clipper* deserves a note on its own behalf. Anyone researching touring theatrical companies will find the *Clipper* a valuable source. It is surprising to find a small town weekly with such polished text and so well illustrated with first-class engravings. Unfortunately, the circus was not a large passion of Loe and Stumm, editors and proprietors.

Fakirs were once again on hand when the show played Newton on August 15. A reporter for the *Kansan* on August 22 expressed surprise that "intelligent men who have travelled much and far, who 'have seen the world' should be taken in by the fakirs who swarm about a circus. One such gentleman contributed \$40 to that class, last Thursday; a man from Halstead paid \$100 for a cake of soap which he *thought* was wrapped in four one-hundred bills; others dropped smaller amounts, and they all are doubtless much wiser, though poorer, than a week ago."

The *Kansan* made a few comments about the show:

"The circus has come and gone; the blare of horns, the tootings of the calliope, the roar of the lions and the chattering of the monkeys, are no longer heard in our city, and the 6,000 people who witnessed the performances are out about \$3,500, while about \$1,000 was expended by the

managers for supplies. But the show was a good one; there were no additions to the menagerie since its prior visit, and but few to the circus, but all they had was good, and what they did was well done. The city was crowded with people, and the farmers had much pleasure in congratulating each other over their magnificent crops."

The advance for Newton was handled by J. H. Davis.

S. H. Barrett led the advance crew that papered Osage City announcing the exhibitions scheduled for August 16. A frequent complaint against circuses was that shows carried large sums of money away from a town and spent insignificant amounts with the local merchants. Barrett countered the charge with the following which appeared in *Kansas People*, Osage City, July 24: "Does a Circus Take All the Money Away.

"As a knock-down argument against the above we give some figures showing the expenses of Sells Brothers and Barrett's united shows. Expense of hotels, bill-boards, living, newspaper advertising, licenses, etc., per day average \$2000; railroad transportation, \$900; daily salaries to performers \$1000 per day; salaries to working men \$950 per day; cost of pictorial printing, \$750 per day; incidental expenses, \$500 per day, making a grand total of over \$6000 that is paid out daily before the owners can see a cent of profit for their investment. Is there a mercantile, manufacturing or mining business in the country that stirs up and circulates among the people as big a sum of money that does not clean up more for its owners than a circus?"

Barrett's workmen finished with Osage City in half a day, but, according to *Kansas People*, the pleasure the bill posters provided was relished for days by children of all ages.

The circus is coming. The children, from grandpa down to the little toddler view the big circus pictures with admiration. The fine pictorial circulars, containing so many big adjectives, describing the wonders to be seen, are read through carefully. These children will wait with pleasurable anticipation the coming of this great show. It will be one of the big days in Osage City. Let them go and see the wonders of the world, we only have a big show once in a while."

"The big show with all the stir and excitement has come and gone," the *Kansas People* reported: "It was fully up to the standard and very few if any went home disappointed, unless it was those who were unable to see more than the parade. In the afternoon the seats in the big tent were nearly full. At night they were about half filled. The company no doubt made more than expenses."

In the middle of May Topeka got its first word on the coming of Sells-Barrett with a report in both the *Kansas Democrat* and the *State Journal* that the monster show would appear on July 1.

The first of July came and went in disappointment. It was July 26, when the *Journal* published the first firm word of the coming.

SELLS BROTHERS

Famous Roman Hippodrome,
3 RING CIRCUS 3
Elevated Stage and 5 Continent Menagerie in mighty Union with
S. H. BARRETT'S
MONSTER WORLD'S FAIR.
Will Exhibit at TOPEKA on
Saturday, AUG. 17.



This ad appeared in the *Topeka State Journal* on August 14, 1889. Kansas State Historical Society.

"S. H. Barrett, of Sells Bros. and Barrett's United Shows, who has been in the city several days billing the town, left this morning with his force of eighteen men for Kansas City. They occupied car No. 1, a gaily painted and elaborately fitted coach. They posted an enormous amount of paper in Topeka, erecting many new stands."

The first newspaper advertisement for the exhibitions of August 17 appeared in the *Democrat* of July 27, simultaneously with the announcement that the Great Forepaugh Show would exhibit in Topeka on August 29. Barrett, spurred by the Forepaugh crew, did an excellent job in

preparing Topeka. In the 22 days before the arrival of Sells-Barrett, the *Democrat* ran 12 handouts and 10 three-column ads; the *Journal* carried 18 two-column ads and three handouts.

Barnum & Bailey paraded a section of fairy tale floats drawn by ponies, which was undoubtedly the inspiration for Sells-Barrett's presentation of the "Children's Dream of Fairyland." This parade attraction represented "the principal features of fairy lore—among which is Robinson Crusoe, Old Mother Goose, Cinderella, Blue Beard, Little Red Riding Hood, Santa Claus and the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe." One charming feature which Barnum did not have was a "miniature Tally-Ho coach with monkey footmen and attendants." A handout captioned "A Novel Parade" explained that in order to transport the Children's Dream of Fairyland it was necessary to build ten new cars, each sixty-five feet in length. The new cars were in addition to the sixty cars required to carry the combined shows.

Seventy cars for Sells-Barrett is in great contradiction to a paragraph that appeared in the *Journal* on July 22, the source for which must have been Forepaugh's advance crew which at the time was billing Topeka.

"It costs something for a great show to travel. Forepaugh's circus requires 43 cars to transport it and it pays the Santa Fe road \$350 per day, or per haul, for seven days in succession. Payments are made in advance. Sells Bros. have twenty-seven cars and pay a proportionate rate."

One should not trust Forepaugh to count the cars used by Sells-Barrett, but neither should one believe that Sells-Barrett moved on 70 cars, or even 60.

On Circus Day, August 17, the *Journal* ran a salute to the Sells brothers, which, in general, is a factual statement.

"A HOME INSTITUTION.
That is How the People Regard
Sells Brothers Great Show.

"Topekaans confess to a lively interest in Sells Bros. & Barrett's great combined shows which exhibit in this city to-day, because it is essentially a home institution. The proprietors of the show are large property holders in Topeka, and one of the brothers, Colonel Allen Sells, is a resident of Topeka and a citizen of whom any city would be proud. He is a man of means, public spirit and enterprise, and has done at least as much as any other man has done in the past ten years to build up Topeka.

"Topeka takes an especial interest in the institution, because the Sells Bros. are so largely concerned in the growth and prosperity of Topeka. Few people are aware of the magnitude of the investments of the Sells Bros., in this locality. They are continually sending money here for in-

vestment. This money comes entirely from the income of their circus, and is gathered from all portions of the United States. Their property in this county is valued at a million dollars or over. It includes such valuable interests as the Parkhurst & Davis building, the Levi block, the Chesterfield hotel, the Strickler Daniels & Pounds building, the Arion block, the Nathanson building occupied by Vesper's bakery, the six eligible lots at Sixth and Monroe, three business lots on the north side, two lots on Kansas avenue between Eighth and Ninth, residence lots on Harrison street, five or six farms and about a hundred thousand dollars invested in other property here. They are heavy tax payers, believe thoroughly in Topeka, and show their faith in a practical manner.

"The city council did a very proper thing in extending Sells show the freedom of the city and waiving the \$150 license fee."

The *Journal* was not skilled in estimating the size of crowds, as is apparent in the following:

"The parade of Sells Bros., and Barrett's great show on Kansas avenue this morning, was witnessed by a tremendous crowd estimated at from 15,000 to 25,000 people. The parade was a good one, but Sells Brothers do not show all they have on the street, and humbug the people when they get inside."

"The iron balcony in front of the building formerly occupied by John D. Knox's bank, was broken this morning during the parade by the height of about twenty-five women and children who crowded upon it. It fell a few feet and caught on a projecting iron. The little girls and boys were thrown in a pile in the lowest corner, but were not injured."

Stopping at the Chesterfield hotel of which Allen Sells was the proprietor were the following: "William Sells, Lewis Sells, R. B. Smith and John Stein of Sells Bros. circus."

"Sanford H. Robinson, D. R. Kelly, C. B. Laird, Andy Wane, Joseph Miller, John Giddens, John Sna, H. Leschinsky and G. H. Saunders of the Forepaugh show."

Police Judge Searle told a *Journal* reporter on Monday after the show had gone that, "It is remarkable that the big circus which visited Topeka Saturday, was not the cause of a single arrest. The police force was increased by a few specials and the chief took every precaution against the toughs which follow such a show. My docket shows but four arrests since Saturday morning, and two of these are for drunkenness. Not a single bur-

glary has been reported, and it is a big complement for the metropolitans."

The August 19 *Democrat* ran the following review: "The Great Show. The Grand Sells Brothers' and Barrett's Combination in Topeka.

"The great Sells Brothers' and Barrett's shows have come and gone and 10,000 people, little and big, were made happy Saturday afternoon and evening by the wonderful performances of this vast ag-

gregation, whose services were in demand on every hand, and whose remarkable energy and executive ability, coupled with an inexhaustible supply of good nature, proved equal to every emergency.

"The show was first-class in every particular, and when Sells Brothers & Barrett again visit Topeka they will be accorded an ovation."

The sole comment following the exhibitions at Clay Center, August 22, was that of the *Times* which said, "It is a solemn fact that a great deal of beer was sold and drank in this city on circus day," proving once again that no one ever died of thirst in prohibition Kansas.

The *Washington Register* had only one comment following the exhibitions of August 24. "Three of the managers of the Forepaugh show came down from Beatrice [Nebraska] Saturday, and attended Sells Bros. exhibition in the afternoon, subsequently engaging several of their best performers."

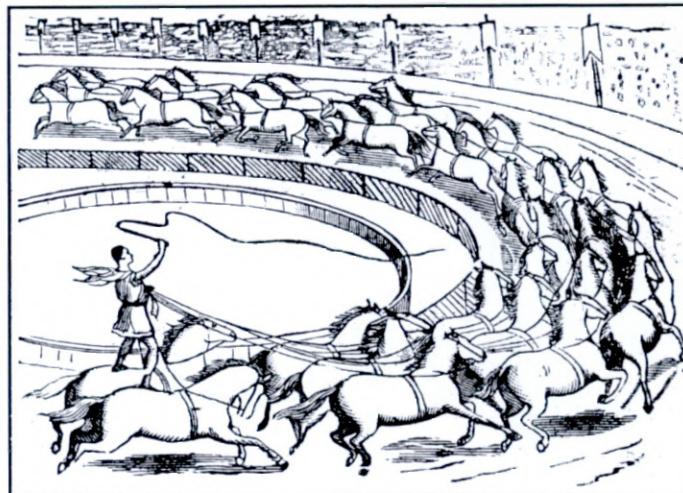
The season of 1889 is important in the story of the Sells family for it marks the beginning of the split between Ephraim, Lewis and Peter on one hand and Allen and Willie on the other. Willie was an outstanding bareback rider who grew up on the Sells show. By 1889 Willie was developing an appetite for "fast" living, booze, gambling and women. At the end of the season the Sells brothers did not renew Willie's contract and Willie did not bother to ask about it. Late in the year Willie signed with Barnum & Bailey for their London engagement, but proved an unsatisfactory performer, missing too many exhibitions.

The question became, "What is Willie's future?" The only possibility of interest to Willie was owning a show of his own. In 1890 Allen gave his attention to the Andress show. Willie became an owner due to a lack of ethics and his father's money.

Following the season of 1889 Allen and his brothers ceased to speak and Willie became a disgusting thorn in the side of his uncles. When Allen died in 1894, only Ephraim attended the funeral.

Willie wanted fame, of which he had had a taste; he wanted money and power; he wanted the respect and deference shown to men of wealth and authority, such as his uncles. Willie wanted it all and the means was not important. One might say Willie was the advance agent for the "NOW" generation, because Willie wanted everything, and wanted it NOW.

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Topeka, Kansas.



This illustration of Roman rider Sig Bleau appeared in newspaper ads and the 1889 route book. Pfening Archives.

gregation of arenic artists and trained animals.

"Everybody in Topeka knows the Sells Brothers and they are regarded to a certain extent as a home institution. That their exhibition was heartily enjoyed by the immense throngs which occupied the monster pavilions during both performances, was emphatically attested by the enthusiastic applause which continually greeted the performers from beginning to end.

"Mr. William Sells, son of Col. W. A. Sells, the popular proprietor of the Chesterfield hotel, came in for the lion's share of the applause which was elicited by his daring bareback riding. His graceful efforts certainly entitle him to be called the champion jockey rider of America.

The thrilling trapeze performances of the Dunbar brothers and of Mr. George Zorella and Miss Emma DuBois were the finest ever witnessed in this city. The performances of the Roman gladiators, Robert and William Gilfort in their beautiful tableaux representing ancient and modern statuary, and the scores of other artists, including the skillful juggling 'Japs,' were all heartily enjoyed. But probably the most versatile artist of this great aggregation was Col. Charles Seeley, the press representative of this enormous ag-



Mike Martin's
CIRCUS HOBBY HALL

"THE BEST OF EUROPEAN CIRCUSES" VOL. 1

**PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE
FINEST SHOWS ON THE CONTINENT !**

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- ★ CLASSIC WILD ANIMAL ACTS, AERIAL AND GROUND PERFORMERS, ELEPHANT DISPLAYS, ACROBATS, JUGGLERS, CLOWNS AND MUCH MORE !
- ★ SEE CIRCUS PRESENTATIONS FROM AMONG THESE FAMOUS SHOWS - TOGNI OF ITALY, CHIPPERFIELD AND ROBERTS OF ENGLAND, PRICE OF SPAIN, BENNEWEIS OF DENMARK, BOUGLIONE OF FRANCE AND MORE !
- ★ ENJOY CENTER RING SEATS IN THIS COLORFUL TOUR OF EUROPE'S VERY BEST !

VHS VIDEO - 2 HOURS - \$27.50 POST PAID

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3. KING BROS. CIRCUS 1962	8. HOXIE BROS. CIRCUS 1975
4. BEATTY-COLE CIRCUS 1965	9. SELLS & GRAY CIRCUS 1974
5. BEATTY-COLE CIRCUS 1969	10. CARSON & BARNES CIRCUS 1973

POSTAGE: MINIMUM OF \$2.50 OR 10% OF TOTAL ORDER, WHICHEVER IS LARGER. FOREIGN ORDERS \$5.00 MINIMUM OR 20% OF TOTAL ORDER, WHICH EVER IS LARGER. PAYABLE IN US FUNDS.

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

**DEPT. BW - 11950 107th AVE. N.
LARGO, FL 34648
FLA. RES. ADD 7% SALES TAX**



CIRCUS LIFE AND ADVENTURE OF ADAM BARDY

Every so often, story books are written that tell of someone who has lived an interesting and adventurous life, and there are times that some local person may come along who has experienced such an adventure in his life's journey. Of local interest is the story of Adam Bardy, who began his "adventure" in 1915, at the age of 8, running away with the great Buffalo Bill Wild West Circus, when the Circus was playing in his home town of Webster, Mass.

This beginning adventure was of very short duration, as Adam met up with gypsy fortune tellers the very next day, and, in their generosity, they gave Adam trolley car fare money, and Adam returned home.

In Adam's teenage years, he lived with woodchoppers in shanties in the woods, and finally in a deserted farmhouse. At the age of 17, Adam joined the Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus. Other large and small circuses were to be Adam's life, until, in 1929, Adam met up with Kentucky Mountaineers, and the life of a bootlegger was to begin. A thrilling adventure as a big-time bootlegger was Adam's lot in life, until the Conn. State Police wiped out the operation. Adam escaped from custody, and a fugitive's existence lasting seven long years began. During this time, Adam learned all about fortune telling, a life he followed for many years. After those seven years, Adam gave up and turned himself in to the police. He went on to raising beautiful meat and show rabbits, and became New England's largest rabbit breeder. Then he went back to doing character readings, using palm readings and handwriting analysis by mail.

But, of all Adam's adventures, his memories of circus life were the best, including the opportunity to have had personal friends like the great Tom Mix, who joined the Sells Floto Circus when Adam was with that circus in 1929, and Adam's interest in boxing, which his good friend Tom Mix really loved.

And now, as Adam lives his quiet life out in the country, he has written an interesting book that tells of his 47 years with his wonderful late wife, Ann, who was a devoted and loving mate. The story tells of what it was like to live with a fugitive and bootlegger husband all those years, and then of her passing in 1980. Adam recounts his loneliness for three years. Adam continues his story by telling how the palmistry reading of a young 21-year-old girl blossomed into a wonderful friendship of true love and romance, as it can come to one who has lived an adventurous, interesting life. The story explains how, through deep faith in God, Adam could live this strange, unusual and interesting life, so full of excitement, and still remain the happy-go-lucky person he still is. Adam credits all this to the guiding hand of God.

The interesting life story of Adam includes that of his close companion, 22-year-old Terry Lyn Bates. Her story alone is well worth the price of the book, as one can see that age alone is not what counts, but the way we live our lives.

The book includes many pictures that tell the life story of Adam. For an autographed copy of "Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy," send check or money order for \$12.95 to:

ADAM BARDY
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